

SHAKESPEARE, GENDER AND THE RHETORIC OF EXCUSE

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Shakespeare, Gender, and the Rhetoric of Excuse

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to provide an historicised account of excuse-making strategies in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. This issue is considered, broadly, in the light of the pervasive influence of rhetoric in early modern culture at large, and specifically, as an aspect of the rhetorical construction of moral ambiguity in Shakespearean drama. Its chief concern is with the intractable ambiguity of 'favourable interpretations' or 'charitable constructions' of actions or events, the apparent desirability of which seems beyond doubt.

Chapter I uses the 'generosity' often regarded as Shakespeare's own trademark as a way into exploring the aims of the thesis. Its central section focuses more closely on the ambiguity inherent in a 'female rhetoric' of mitigation, apology and extenuation. Where these chapters concentrate on 'covert' excuse-making strategies, Chapter V, by contrast, begins with an exploration of the early modern transformation (or domestication) of classical, female orators into decent, modest, seventeenth-century women. The thesis concludes with an account of Shakespeare's suppliant women, a group of petitioners who are repeatedly represented 'between men'. The persistence of this pattern, I argue, stresses the extent to which excuse-making is gendered, and might be read, as well, as the playwright's own attempt to 'contain' the radical moral ambiguity (radical because as difficult to condone as to condemn) generated by such 'female' excuse-making.

I, Rachel Emma Heard, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 91,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

3rd February 2003

I was admitted as a research student in September 1998 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD. in September 1998; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1998 and 2003.

3rd February 2003

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD. in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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A Note on Transcription

In all quoted matter, I have silently expanded contractions, and regularised early modern textual conventions such as long *-s*, and consonantal *i* and *u* in accordance with modern usage.

The Preface to the Reader

So many Criticks have we in these daies that nothing can well passe without an Apologie.¹

When Samuel Kendrick stood up before his congregation at Eckington, on the twelfth of November 1626, he little realised how thankful he would be to step down. All tangible primary evidence of what was said to him during and after the sermon has long since vanished. Yet the wealth of prefatory material attached to its printed form (published a year later) suggests that strong objections to the message were raised at the time.

The subject so displeasing to Kendrick's audience was the enmity of the Galatians towards St. Paul, once a friend for whom they would have 'pulled out their owne eyes'. Having been censured by him for some error of judgement, however, the 'foolish Galatians' grew so embittered that the apostle, amazed at this sudden *volte face*, asked, 'Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?'² For his own part, Kendrick cannot understand why a relationship based on mutual love and respect should not survive such honesty. Quite baffled, he resignedly concedes the existence of a precedent for this unnatural behaviour:

But so it fared with Christ himselfe ... A mans enemies shall be those of his owne house; *Jobs* owne wife against him: *Absolon* seekes his owne *fathers* overthrow: *Ismael* mockes his owne *brother*: what wonder then, if a *Ministers owne hearers* oppose themselves against him?³

In his choice of subject matter, at least, Kendrick is happy. His evocation of the Galatians' hostility to Paul lends a satisfying inevitability to his own first-hand experience of the 'Tell-Troths requital'.

The minister was no doubt pleased with the parallel, but probably realised it was not exact. It becomes clear, as the preface continues, that his experience of

¹ Henry Morely, *The Cleansing of the Leper* (London, 1604), sig. A2v.

² Samuel Kendrick, *The Tell-Troths Requital, or Truth's Recompense* (London, 1627), pp. 21, 10 and 20.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

truth-telling differed from Paul's, and his listeners' reactions from those of the Galatians, in one important respect. Whereas Paul's flock cared little 'with what straine of words he stud[ied] to please' them, whether with 'plainnesse of speech' or with 'eloquence', since it was 'the matter that occasion[ed their] hatred; the *telling of the Truth*' (20), Kendrick's own parishioners obviously had ears rather for the manner of his delivery than for its substance. As he puts it in his dedicatory epistle to the 'Ministers of the Gospell of the Truth', 'if in this Pamphlet':

my phrase shall seeme too clownish, (for such was the adversaries comment upon the delivery) pardon it, and say, I live among my fellowes, and have not, as yet, learned any better eloquence, than (with the home bred Souldier) to call a Spade a Spade. Besides, some of you know, that Physick is a part of my profession and practice: and therein of strong poison, I make an wholesome medicine: why may not then some Balme of Gilead (by a divine confection) be extracted out of a harsh phrase; which (simply taken) may breed an offence (sig. A3).

The sincerity of Kendrick's apology for his 'dull oratory' (sig. A2v) is undermined here by his pride in the manly willingness with which he 'call[s] a spade a spade'. This covert boast notwithstanding, his textual preliminaries are not without their concessions to 'eloquence'. As it appears on the page, Kendrick's alleged preference for plain truth telling (even at the risk of 'breed[ing] an offence') competes for space with exactly the same conventions of deference as appear in the vast majority of early modern prefatory epistles.⁴ Injected into Kendrick's defence of his own (and Paul's) truth telling are repeated cravings for indulgence from his fellow ministers. 'Nor is my request without reason', he says, 'if you consider the nature of my subject; where nobility entreats not onely the courtesie, but commands the debt of your acceptance' (sig. A2v). Thus, having preached a sermon to 'Critickes, whose best learning consists of censuring others', 'Bastard Curs' who, 'when they dare not bite, dare barke', Kendrick offers its printed version to others from whom he expects more

⁴ The classic treatment of this subject is J.W. Saunders's 'The Stigma of Print: A Note on the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry', *Essays in Criticism* 1.2 (1951): 139-64. See also Clara Gebert,

sympathy: his 'Brethren, whose grave discretion & Christian love have taught you to cover an error' (sig. A3).

But taking orders was not the only means by which Kendrick's contemporaries learned how to 'cover an error'. Other methods were learnt at school, and with complete impunity, as part of the early modern training in rhetoric designed to prepare young men for active civic duty. To provide an account of the factors governing early modern subjects' mobilisation of such exculpatory strategies, and to examine the nature of the strategies themselves, are the principal aims of this thesis. The investigation to follow, however, will focus, for the most part, on the impact of this training on negotiations conducted in a somewhat less 'public' sphere. This emphasis is not quite as wilfully perverse as it sounds. As Thomas Conley has argued:

Even when rhetoric ceased to have direct political relevance, the habits of mind, the concern with eloquence and the methods of analysis rhetoric provided, continued to saturate the literary production of the age. In short, far from being 'a monstrous aberration,' as the historian Burckhart once characterized it, rhetoric is in many ways the key to a proper understanding of the culture of the Renaissance.⁵

Conley's evocation of 'rhetoric' in this passage corresponds to the first definition of the word in the *OED*. 'Rhetoric', this piece of scholarly apparatus tells us, is 'the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others; the body of rules to be observed by a speaker or writer in order that he may express himself with eloquence'.⁶ Any Tudor grammar school-boy would have been familiar (perhaps painfully so) with the 'body of rules' mentioned here. In the *Institutio Oratoria*, a text whose influence on early modern pedagogy is well known,⁷ Quintilian broke down what he called the 'system of oratory' into five

ed., *An Anthology of Elizabethan Dedications and Prefaces*, rpt. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966).

⁵ Thomas Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 143.

⁶ rhetoric 1a.

⁷ John O. Ward, for example, has shown that between 1482 and 1599 upwards of forty editions presented texts of the *Institutes* with annotations, commentaries, and also (or instead of) *castigationes* or *argumenta*. See his 'Renaissance Commentators on Ciceronian Rhetoric', in James J. Murphy, ed., *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of*

constituent parts: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronunciatio*. By following the rules of invention, disposition, elocution, memory and delivery, the student learned how to find matter for, how to arrange, how to decorate, how to memorise, and finally, how to deliver, an accomplished oration. Used in this sense, the word 'rhetoric' refers to a discipline, the mastery of which, classical and early modern theorists believed, resulted in discourse capable of persuading or influencing others — the 'art', that is to say, of 'expressing [oneself] with eloquence'.

This is not the sense in which the word 'rhetoric' tends to be used today. In the section on 'language' in his Shakespeare primer, Sean McEvoy claims that rhetoric has 'acquired a generally bad press': that we 'use the phrase "just rhetoric" to mean bluster empty of reason or logic'.⁸ Chris Park's account of the international debate on pollution, entitled *Acid Rain: Rhetoric and Reality*, identifies rhetoric, quite explicitly, as something very different from truth. Here, again, 'rhetoric' is discovered at the heart of the political — acquiring a negative moral value through its association with 'spin'. Writing in 1946, when the term was not yet current, George Orwell declared that 'political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible' happenings 'which are too brutal for most people to face':

Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification* ... People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.⁹

I, too, will be concerned with the 'phraseology' used to 'name things without calling up mental pictures of them', and with ideas of 'defence' more

Renaissance Rhetoric (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 158-62, at pp. 158-9.

⁸ Sean McEvoy, *Shakespeare: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 53.

⁹ George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', in *Collected Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 353.

generally, but am chiefly interested in the kinds of excuse which, for various reasons, could not be condemned so soundly. This is not to say that they were condoned; on the contrary, as I hope to show, the reluctance of early modern subjects to 'call a spade a spade' was still regarded with suspicion, even when it was not motivated by the anticipation of personal profit or preferment.

With this focus in mind, there are reasons other than the obvious one for beginning with prefaces. The early modern preface is itself an exercise in apology, extenuation and mitigation — a kind of special pleading to the reader to overlook deficiencies. Samuel Kendrick's hope that the men to whom his book was dedicated would 'cover [his] error' is repeated in the many prefaces which imagine such 'covering' in terms of physical protection. Professing perturbation at the inherent 'weakness' of his text, Fynes Moryson commends the *Itinerary* (1617) to the protection of William, Earl of Pembroke, fully confident that however fragile 'it shall triumph under the safeguard of that massy shield'. A more elaborate but basically identical device reappears in a preface by the physician W. Cuningham. In this case it is Sir Robert Dudley before whom the 'humble suter' Cuningham places his textual offering, ardently desirous 'that it may come forth under your noble protection: and be defended as Teucer was under the shield of mighty Ajax'.¹⁰

For an author to crave protection from a patron for a work flawed by his own inexperience was a form of self-exculpation used as standard. Early modern prefatory epistles positively overflow with self-effacing admissions of their authors' literary gaucheries. In his epistle 'To the Courteous and uncourteous Readers', William Hall shows signs of being afflicted with this disease, one of the symptoms of which, apparently, is the sufferer's compulsion to flatly deny ever having possessed any aptitude for his subject whatsoever. 'I must confesse my Muse is young and tender', he writes:

And this is all the scuse that I can render,
This is the first time shee did ever write;
Therefore with currish words doe not her bite.
Lest in her budding you doe spoyle her growth,
If that you should doe so I should be loth:
Give her no ill words with good words her nourish,

¹⁰ W. Cuningham, *The Cosmographical Glasse* (London, 1559), sig. A2v.

That shee in time may grow, and bud, and flourish.¹¹

Hall excuses his own text here by implying that for his readers not to do likewise would constitute a fundamental rejection of Christian charity. Similarly, when Samuel Kendrick explained to his congregation that Christian charity taught readers to 'cover an error' he was in a sense making an excuse for rhetoric itself, by redefining its arts in terms of a moral virtue.

These last two words — 'moral' and 'virtue' — do not occur very frequently in recent criticism of early modern literature. According to Debora Shuger, 'the recent lack of interest in the religious significance of Shakespearean drama stems in part from a suspicion that it possessed no such significance'.¹² My own approach to the subject is in part informed by Shuger's claim that 'if it is not plausible to read Shakespeare's plays as Christian allegories, neither is it likely that the popular drama of a religiously saturated culture could, by a secular miracle, have extricated itself from the theocentric orientation informing the discourses of politics, gender, social order and history'.¹³ My aim in what follows is to examine early modern excuse-making strategies in the light of such discourses, and in particular, to draw attention to the radical ambiguity of excuses made by women in this setting.

At the beginning of this preface I suggested that the early modern training in rhetoric could have helped young men learn how to 'cover an error', and certainly, part of that training might have involved learning how to use the rhetorical figure (to which we will return in Chapter II) designed to 'excuse a fault, and to make an offence seem less than it is'. The assumption that such linguistic strategies would help men make their way in the world is, of course, part of the reason that they were regarded with suspicion. At the same time as Samuel Kendrick, for example, berates those whose 'best learning is to censure others, his harping on 'spades' is clearly underwritten by an assumption about the inextricable link between rhetoric and insincerity. The language which we might

¹¹ William Hall, *Mortalities Meditation; or, a Description of Sinne* (London, 1624), sig. A3r.

¹² Debora K. Shuger, 'Subversive Fathers and Suffering Subjects: Shakespeare and Christianity', in Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier, eds., *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*

now associate with the politician was in the early modern period often associated with the flatterer — whose ‘base mind is well matched with a mercenary tongue’, who is ‘a Porter of all good tales, and mends them in the carriage’, and who ‘hath salves for every sore, to hide them not to heale them’.¹⁴ My aim in this thesis is to reassess the moral implications of such strategies when they are used for apparently less dubious purposes, by figures whose gender would, for the most part, have denied them a training in rhetoric, but whose creator, Shakespeare, would have received just such a training.

¹⁴ Joseph Hall, *Characters of Vertues and Vices*, in *The Works of Joseph Hall* (London, 1634), pp. 173-4.

Chapter I

Deliberating Shakespeare

Shakespeare has pleased many and pleased long
because his is the art of humankindness.¹

In a poll conducted at the end of 1998, listeners to Radio 4's *Today* program voted William Shakespeare their 'personality of the millennium'. Since the 'Stratford poet' himself was obviously unavailable for comment, *The Times* invited Stanley Wells, vice-chairman of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, to say a few words on his behalf. Professor Wells said that the playwright's enduring appeal transcended social, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, because his work was 'grounded in a profound humanity and reflected the things that mattered in everyday life'.²

Appropriated and recast by the article's author, Wells's response ends up providing the by-line for the entire piece. 'SHAKESPEARE, whose timeless writing, poetic vision and profound humanity is celebrated the world over, has been named as the personality of the millennium', Alexandra Frean exclaimed. Frean is obviously paraphrasing the eminent Shakespearean here, but in the process of doing so she has subtly but significantly altered his meaning. She is, admittedly, writing a laudatory piece for a non-specialist audience; and to criticise her (quite possibly unconscious) slippage from the 'profound humanity' evident in Shakespeare's work, to the 'profound humanity' of Shakespeare himself, is, perhaps, a little churlish. After all, Alexandra Frean is hardly the first reader of Shakespeare to have taken for granted an *a priori* knowledge of his character. What the result of Radio 4's poll tells us is that the impulse to respond to Shakespeare's 'personality' did not disappear with the waning popularity of the 'biographical' approach to the Shakespearean text, associated most famously

¹ Robert Kimbrough, *Shakespeare and the Art of Humankindness: The Essay Toward Androgyny* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1990), p. 3.

² 'Much Ado About Shakespeare', *The Times*, 2nd January 1999, p. 3.

with Edward Dowden, and later with E.K. Chambers.³ On the contrary, the assumption that we as readers of these texts can 'know' something of their author is, unlike the man himself, alive, well, and 'celebrated the world over'.

But there are, of course, different ways of 'knowing'. In 1780, the scholar and editor George Steevens supplied a deflating corrective to the fashion begun by Shakespeare's first biographer, Nicholas Rowe, for concocting thrilling stories about various formative episodes in the playwright's life:

As all that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakspeare, is — *that he was born at Stratford upon Avon, — married and had children there, — went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays, — returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried,* — I must confess my readiness to combat every unfounded supposition respecting the particular occurrences of his life.⁴

This implicit rejection of Rowe's methodology makes Shakespeare sound a little like the notoriously short-lived nursery-rhyme hero, Solomon Grundy — born on Monday, christened on Tuesday, married on Wednesday, and so on. From his eighteenth-century perspective, Steevens is convinced that, where Shakespeare is concerned, epistemological certainty is a rare commodity indeed.⁵

³ According to Samuel Schoenbaum, 'no biographical pattern imposed on Shakespeare before or since has made so profound an impact as Dowden's. The Dublin professor is the only academic critic of Shakespeare whose work would remain uninterruptedly in print for almost a century'. *Shakespeare's Lives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 496. In his *Shakespeare: A Survey* (London: Macmillan, 1925), E.K. Chambers provided one of the most famous 'biographical' readings of what were known for years as Shakespeare's 'problem plays', grouping *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Troilus and Cressida* together as 'the singularly interesting record of a particular phase in the poet's shifting outlook upon humanity'; describing them as 'the utterances of a disturbed spirit ... looking with new misgivings into the ambiguous shadows of a world over which a cloud has passed and made a goblin of the sun' (210). In a survey of Shakespearean criticism spanning the years 1900-1964, Irving Ribner considers 'psychological' readings like Dowden's to be 'of relatively slight importance', but does concede that they spawned other more 'fruitful' studies by the likes of Caroline Spurgeon, who also worked from the 'assumption that Shakespeare the man could be discovered in his plays'. See his 'Shakespeare Criticism 1900-1964', in Edward A. Bloom, ed., *Shakespeare 1564-1964: A Collection of Modern Essays by Various Hands* (Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1964), pp. 194-5. As late as 1992, Garry O'Connor opened his *William Shakespeare: A Life* (Sevenoaks: Sceptre, 1992), with the assertion that 'Shakespeare left his true biography [elsewhere described as a 'strong presence'] in his plays and poems' (1).

⁴ Edmond Malone, ed., *Supplement to the Edition of Shakspeare's Plays Published in 1778 by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens*, 2 volumes (London, 1780), I, p. 654 (italics in original).

⁵ G.B. Harrison puts the birth of this epistemological scepticism somewhat later. According to him, it was Sidney Lee's 1898 *Life of Shakespeare*, where page after page of 'confident statements were qualified with "there is little room for doubt that," "it was doubtless," "it is

With the benefit of an additional two centuries of research behind them, his twentieth-century counterparts might justifiably assume a less sceptical position. As Jonathan Bate has argued, we do in fact 'know a great deal more about Shakespeare's life than we do about the lives of most of his fellow-dramatists and fellow-actors'. But, he counters, this knowledge is contained for the most part in the form of official documents. From these we learn 'that Shakespeare invested his income shrewdly and was mildly litigious'.⁶ They also tell us that in May 1597 Shakespeare took legal possession of New Place, the largest house in Stratford.⁷ They cannot prove that he also had a stake in the ownership of a far more elusive property: namely, 'profound humanity'.

Playing devil's advocate in her contribution to a volume entitled *Shakespeare's Personality*, Barbara Freedman summarises the position thus:

Question: "Given an author who has been dead for almost four hundred years and who, in over thirty-five plays, never revealed much of his character, what can you tell us about his personality?" Answer: "The author reveals the personality of the type of person who does not reveal his personality."⁸

Freedman's comment may retroactively question the validity of Shakespeare's posthumous title, but it by no means detracts from its significance. If anything, it makes the outcome of the 'personality of the millennium' competition more worthy of attention than before. My object in lingering so doggedly over Shakespeare's victory at the polls is not to add to the distinguished body of critics who have, over the course of several centuries, lovingly nurtured the idea of Shakespeare's high-mindedness — defending it, almost unto death, from the threatening encroachments of an 'intolerant coalition of Marxists, rabid

possible", that was responsible for a 'general feeling that, after all, nothing was really known about him'. See Harrison's *Introducing Shakespeare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), p. 22.

⁶ Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1997), p. 4.

⁷ See Anthony Holden's *William Shakespeare: His Life and Work* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), p. 155.

⁸ Barbara Freedman, 'Misrecognizing Shakespeare', in Norman N. Holland, Sidney Homan and Bernard J. Paris, eds., *Shakespeare's Personality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 254.

feminists, godless deconstructionists, and diseased gays'.⁹ Instead I will argue that these unashamedly moral judgements tell us something important about the unique nature of this writer's dramatic art.

Immediate thought must therefore be given to the perplexing question of how a playwright who 'reveals the personality of the type of person who does not reveal his personality' can possibly be voted personality of the millennium, and, moreover, be assumed to have earned that title through an exhibition of 'profound humanity'. The verdict reached by Alexandra Frean (and a plethora of Radio 4 listeners) makes an anachronistic mockery of Northrop Frye's claim that 'style had its great period in late Victorian times, when the primary connection between writing and personality was a fundamental principle of criticism'.¹⁰ Aware that 'style', like other broad conceptual categories, is susceptible to misinterpretation, Frye elaborates on his chosen term:

In all literary structures we are aware of a quality that we may call the quality of a verbal personality or a speaking voice — something different from direct address, though related to it. When this quality is felt to be the voice of the author himself, we call it style: *le style c'est l'homme* is a generally accepted axiom.¹¹

Frye's remarks on 'style' are important to our discussion of Shakespeare for several reasons. What is obvious at once is that the desire of the playwright's followers to forge a 'Victorian' connection between personality and writing has long outlasted Queen Victoria's reign. The second point, and the more crucial, is that Frye's observation seems bound to stop the search for Shakespeare's personality dead in its tracks. For if *le style c'est l'homme* is a generally accepted axiom, it is an equally widely accepted commonplace that the 'voice' of Shakespeare in Shakespearean drama is seldom if ever to be heard. Now ridiculed, early attempts to imagine him as an erstwhile lawyer, soldier or sailor, are, in fact, understandable reactions to Shakespeare's own obstinate silence.

⁹ Stanley Fish's caricature of the elements most likely to undermine humanist teaching in the academy, cited in Rebecca W. Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 3.

¹⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 268.

¹¹ Ibid.

This notoriously tight-lipped 'personality' is nicely captured in Frye's account of a playwright who held 'no opinions, no values, no philosophy of anything except dramatic structure'.¹² The figure is familiar enough, but surely this apparent moral neutrality would hardly make him the most 'decent of dramatists', as Frye calls him elsewhere. In his work, I would argue, we glimpse the critical sleight of hand by which Shakespeare's apparent absence of character becomes a positive character trait, which is then produced (by early twentieth-century critics in particular) as incontrovertible evidence of his 'profound humanity'.

Published in 1925, John Dover Wilson's 'biography' of Shakespeare provides another example of this process in action. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, it also bears traces of the 'Victorian' tendency to move unconcernedly between 'personality' and 'writing' and back. Launching his discussion with a contemporary allusion to Shakespeare's 'ready and pleasant ... wit', Dover Wilson proceeds to deduce, by quoting lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that the imagination from whence they sprung could only have belonged to 'one of the most delightful companions the world has ever known'.¹³ Staying with the subject of companions, he then falls to wondering how Shakespeare managed to win 'powerful' friends and influence 'cultivated' people. The answer he eventually returns has to do with the playwright's 'own admirable circumspection':

However he might yield himself to the frenzy of inspiration when the mood for composition was on him, he kept his head in the practical affairs of life. This was due not to any cold and calculated policy of self-interest, such for instance as directed Bacon's steps in similar circumstances, but rather to his large-hearted tolerance and universal sympathy, to what Keats called that "negative capability" of his which was the foundation and condition of all his art. He never commits himself deeply to a cause or to a point of view, whatever his affection or admiration for those who hold it might be, because Life itself in all its infinite variety is far more interesting than any opinions, doctrines or points of view about it.¹⁴

¹² *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 39.

¹³ J. Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare: A Biographical Adventure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6.

Dover Wilson's reading of Keats in this passage is quite as interesting as his reading of Shakespeare. It is certainly as revealing. Exactly how the biographer contrives to make the vast conceptual leap from Shakespeare's business acumen to his 'negative capability' remains a puzzle. More obvious is his dogged determination to try it. Along the way he also manages to distinguish Shakespeare's pursuit of popularity from the 'cold and calculated policy' directing Francis Bacon's. The implication is, of course, that Shakespeare achieved professional success with the bare minimum of exertion. Bacon's alleged implementation of a premeditated stratagem serves to confer a certain spirit of spontaneity on Shakespeare, who is loved, unlike the cold-blooded scientist, for the kindness and tolerance he showed by nature. In the context of this argument, Keats's recognition of the 'limitless possibility of the Shakespearian imagination' is pressed into service as an index of the unlimited capacity of his heart.¹⁵

As his critique moves forward, this once influential critic's very selective exploitation of his source becomes ever more apparent. Keats goes on, in the famous 'negative capability' letter, to describe Shakespeare as a poet content to rest with 'half knowledge'; as one 'capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.¹⁶ The spectre of this observation hovers in the margins of Dover Wilson's account of a man who 'never commits himself deeply to a cause or to a point of view', but Keats himself receives no further mention. So why doesn't Dover Wilson supply the remainder of the quotation? Surely its allusion to a playwright disinclined to 'irritability' could only add yet another agreeable facet to the 'delightful companion' of whom he initially spoke.

One possible reason for its omission might involve Dover Wilson's inability to imagine Shakespeare doing anything by 'half' measures — 'knowing', especially. It is easy to picture him objecting to Northrop Frye's description of Shakespeare as a man *without* opinions, values or principles, preferring instead to see him following them with modest restraint. Making the

¹⁵ The quotation is from Nicholas Roe's *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 233.

¹⁶ See Jonathan Bate, ed., *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, rpt. (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 198.

translation from Keats invisible eliminates the need to envisage Shakespeare ever having harboured the least 'uncertainty' or 'doubt'. Dover Wilson's Shakespeare knows his own mind but is blessed, as well, with a 'large-hearted tolerance and universal sympathy' capacious enough to accommodate the opinions and values of all comers. In this reading, as in Frye's, Shakespeare's apparent lack of personal opinion is re-inscribed as a feature of his anti-dogmatic approach to life.

Given Dover Wilson's enthusiastic appropriation of Keats, it is surprising to find that a quintessentially 'Romantic' attitude to Shakespeare is in fact more prominent in the work of Northrop Frye. Dover Wilson is, at any rate, less willing than he to accept 'the element of "mystery" ... in Shakespeare [that] is one of the gifts of the Romantic Movement to Shakespeare criticism, and one for which', T.S. Eliot believed, 'we have reason to be grateful'.¹⁷ Unlike that of the shadowy, ephemeral playwright presented by Frye (and clearly influenced by several Romantic readings), the palpable vitality of Dover Wilson's Shakespeare is never in doubt.¹⁸ It is hard to imagine this Shakespeare being 'everywhere and nowhere'. On the contrary, he is discovered at the heart of a bustling community, given friends and drinking partners, and even menaced by hypothetical toothaches, all of which emphasise his active participation in 'the practical affairs of life'.

This representation of Shakespeare as a writer immersed in the reality of the quotidian lent support to his role as an unrivalled creator of individual characters. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, his genius was identified as being for a vivid particularity of description, rather than for the general. Dover Wilson gives this idea a liberal humanist twist by relating it to Shakespeare's interest in 'Life', with a quite literal capital 'L' — a concern which led him to reject any single, paltry, point of view, and to see all things from every conceivable angle.

Possibly the most ironic thing about Dover Wilson's account is that Shakespeare's refusal to 'commit himself deeply to a cause or to a point of view'

¹⁷ T.S. Eliot, 'From Dryden to Coleridge', in Harley Granville-Barker and G.B. Harrison, eds., *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 298.

¹⁸ Frye's account of Shakespeare as someone who held 'no opinions, no values, no philosophy of anything ...', is clearly influenced by, for example, Hazlitt's recognition that he 'seemed scarcely

is lauded as exemplary behaviour in the same breath as opprobrium is heaped upon the 'cold and calculated policy' favoured by Francis Bacon. Whereas the humanist critic does his utmost to separate poet from essayist, later criticism found increasing reason to stress the link between them. Largely indifferent to the issue of moral excellence, this strand of criticism focused on how a shared intellectual climate, inherited by Bacon as well as by Shakespeare, actively fostered an unwillingness to consider any question from one side only. Implicitly, these readings offered an historical explanation for Shakespeare's ability to remain in uncertainty and doubt, 'without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'. The chief concern of such critical narratives, however, was neither with 'large-hearted tolerance' nor 'universal sympathy', but with the rhetorical construction of moral ambiguity.

Historicist work in this field began in earnest in the last quarter of the twentieth century with Joel Altman's groundbreaking study *The Tudor Play of Mind*. Altman proposes that the moral ambiguity evident in drama written as early as the end of the fifteenth century is a product of the early modern humanist training in logic, dialectic, and rhetoric, which cultivated minds well schooled in the habit of arguing *in utramque partem* — on both sides of the question. 'Arguing both sides of the question was frequently employed as a method of political inquiry and (not infrequently) of political hedging; it appears as a mode of theological speculation and even of scientific investigation'.¹⁹ The men who later undertook such inquiries began to acquire the intellectual tools with which to do so at an early age. Most if not all were graduates of the Tudor grammar school system, taught according to methods akin to those set down in the statutes of the cathedral school at Durham in the 1590s.²⁰ Having progressed from

to have an individual existence of his own' (in Bate, ed., *Romantics*, p. 166); and by Keats's decision that he had 'no identity' (ibid., p. 199).

¹⁹ Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 32.

²⁰ For an account of the impact on Shakespeare of a grammar school education see Hardin Craig's 'Shakespeare and the Trivium', in Edward Bloom, ed., *Shakespeare 1564-1964: A Collection of Modern Essays by Various Hands* (Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1964). Drawing on T.W. Baldwin's monumental *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, Craig defends Shakespeare's want of a university education, arguing that the grammar school is perhaps of 'more value to civilization than the university, since education in grammar schools, if carried far enough, might be said to be culturally adequate' (169). Craig's discussion focuses on 'grammar' as the first of the 'trivial' subjects which constituted the curriculum of the grammar school, the two others being rhetoric and logic. Grammar is presented as 'the gateway to all

making his own 'epistle' to making a 'theame', the student was considered advanced enough to

have redd unto him the bookes of Cicero ad Heremium [*sic*], wherein the schoolemaister shall teach the schollers to frame and make an oration according to the precepts of Rhetorick ... thus: the schoolemaister shall propound a theame or argument which shall have two parties, and two schollers shall be appointed, the one shall take the first part, the other the second ... and upon Saturday ... shall shew their orations.²¹

Far from being learned one day and forgotten the next, the profound impact of this intensive formal training on the early modern mindset can be traced through a diverse range of texts. The permeation of the 'eristic turn of mind' into even the most apparently unlikely areas of intellectual life is made manifest in Erasmus's *Diatriba de Libero Arbitrio*, a debate on 'free will' which is itself governed by the method of the Ciceronian *controversia*.²² Humanists like Erasmus, who employed and developed the skills and tools of ancient orators, 'dealt with the world of common experience in terms of the probable, the likely, and the verisimilar'.²³ Opinions were offered simply as *satis probabile*, or 'sufficiently probable' — the presence of watertight 'proofs' considered neither a necessary nor a desirable feature of inquiries in which the 'formal systematic search for abstract truth' played little part.²⁴

Other investigations of the historical basis for this epistemological relativism have been undertaken by Lee Jacobus and Victoria Kahn. Kahn suggests that 'Quattrocento dialogues, treatises on free will, paradoxical encomia, and essays' all attest to the humanist cognisance of the contrary interpretations capable of being elicited from their own texts.²⁵ Where Kahn treats the subject

learning', and the 1750 echoes of Latin literature in Shakespeare's plays as evidence of what 'the grammar school taught or inspired him to do on his own' (174).

²¹ Cited in T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 volumes (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944-50), I, p. 412.

²² On Erasmus's 'dialogue' with Luther see Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 122-4.

²³ See Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 7.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 23.

of early modern 'academic skepticism' more generally, Jacobus applies it to Shakespearean drama in particular. His reading focuses on the impact on Shakespeare of thinkers such as Francis Bacon and Michel de Montaigne, both of whom, he claims, were influenced by the special brand of scepticism associated with the fourth-century B.C. philosopher, Pyrrho. Preserved to us in the writings of Diogenes Laertius (hence 'the cynic') Pyrrho's central contention was that 'for every position or argument, an equally strong contrary may be proposed'.²⁶ Translating a verse from Homer in his essay 'On the uncertainty of our judgement', Montaigne likewise maintained that 'there is every possibility of speaking for and against anything'.²⁷ A similarly self-deprecating reflection on 'How our mind tangles itself up' led him to conclude that 'there is nothing certain except that nothing is certain'.²⁸

Like that adopted by earlier proponents of the humanist dialogue form, Montaigne's approach to 'inquiry' thereby encouraged the advancement of arguments which might be clearly inconsistent, but which, if shown to be equally plausible, must then be allowed to coexist. 'To condemn [a thing] as impossible is to be rashly presumptuous', he argued;²⁹ his own determination to 'remain in suspense' thus stressing his affinity with humanists such as Erasmus, whose arguments pro and contra were motivated by a comparable desire to see final judgement on ethical questions indefinitely deferred.

Bacon produced numerous essays, too, of course, and whilst his 'Aphorisms' also "invite men to inquire further" 'by suggesting hypotheses and raising doubts', the Englishman's scepticism actually achieves its fullest expression elsewhere.³⁰ Indeed, Pyrrho's theory that 'every saying has its corresponding opposite' exerts a more obvious influence on the content and structure of Bacon's *Colours of Good and Evil* — a set of commonplace generalisations to be used in deliberative discourse. As a contemporary of

²⁶ See Lee A. Jacobus, *Shakespeare and the Dialectic of Certainty* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 5.

²⁷ 'On the uncertainty of our judgement', in Michel de Montaigne: *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 314.

²⁸ 'How our mind tangles itself up', in Screech, ed., p. 693.

²⁹ 'That it is madness to judge the true and the false from our own capacities', in Screech, ed., p. 202.

³⁰ On the 'Aphorisms', see William J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1550-1640* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 192-4, at p. 193.

Bacon's explained it, 'the Deliberative kinde of Negotiation ... differeth from the *Judicial*, as having reference to publike matters more than to private businesses; and consisteth either in perswading men to that which we thinke the better; or dissuading them from that which we esteeme to be the worse'.³¹ Bacon's commitment to this project is apparent from the outset; his table of 'colours' identified as a tool with the help of which men may learn 'what is good and what is evil, and of good, what is the greater, and of evil what is the less'.³² Each colour takes the form of a precept that is 'sufficiently broad in application to be used in almost any context in which it is required to show that one course of action is preferable to another':

The colour is supported by illustrations, supporting comparisons, quotations and examples. Each colour is countered by an *elenchus* [refutation], which contradicts the original colour (but is equally a widely accepted commonplace), and supports its opposition by a comparable collection of counter-illustrations.³³

Although Bacon claims that the 'reprehension of these colours' is necessary for the formation of a 'true and safe judgement', the ensuing series of carefully balanced examples suggests the exact reverse. Each plausible precept is immediately undermined (or at least problematised) by an equally plausible counter-illustration. By copiously reproducing such examples, the author compels his reader to accept the coexistence of more than one popular 'truth'. Driven by the intellectually curious humanist tradition, then, the compiler of the *Colours* ensures that habits of thought are questioned before they are unthinkingly endorsed. The table provides a physically realised indication of indeterminacy through which its reader is challenged to deny the actuality of multiple perspectives on almost any issue he cares to raise.

In this way, Bacon confers on his own epistemological uncertainty an intellectual credibility that is denied to other, less cerebral, manifestations of

³¹ Daniel Tuvil, *The Dove and the Serpent* (London, 1613), pp. 64-5.

³² *Of the Colours of Good and Evil*, in Brian Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 97.

³³ Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 220-21.

scepticism in the period. Consider Daniel Tuvil's derisory treatment of 'old men', who, 'having by reason of their yeares, and long experience discovered, that whatsoever is under the Sunne is vanitie and liable to chaunce':

will not utter their opinion positively in anything, but undervalue every thing more than is requisite or convenient. Their discourse is alwayes limited with doubts, and suppositions and enterlaced with *Peradventures*, *It may bees*, or other such like tearmes of *Moderation*; so whatsoever they propound, they adhere to nothing. They are for the most part left-handed (that is to say) malicious, and apt to conster all things in the worst sense. Their hardnes of beliefe doth furnish them with matter of suspition; and the knowledge they have of worldly policie, doth authorize their incredulity.³⁴

Tuvil's comment is notable primarily for its hostility to senescent scepticism.³⁵ Here the man who suspends judgement (and 'will not utter [his] opinion in anything') is branded a suspicious, hard-hearted cynic. In this context, scepticism which 'adhere[s] to nothing' is envisaged as a crippling agent of limitation.

This wizened and penurious ambivalence is in stark contrast to the 'skeptical openness' which twentieth-century critics like Norman Rabkin found in Shakespeare. Published just over a decade before Altman's study, Rabkin's *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* looks from a humanist perspective at a phenomenon that his successor would later relate to the specific cultural conditions in which it occurred.

What Altman would call the 'eristic turn of mind' appears in Rabkin's text as the 'dialectical dramaturgy' he considers to be 'the most notable constant in Shakespeare's work'.³⁶ The experience of *Hamlet* is a case in point:

³⁴ Tuvil, *The Dove and the Serpent*, p. 54 (italics in original).

³⁵ A similar view is expressed less overtly in Horace's assertion that 'Many ills encompass an old man, whether because he seeks gain, and then miserably holds aloof from his store and fears to use it, or because, in all that he does, he lacks fire and courage, is dilatory and slow to form hopes'. See the *Ars Poetica*, in *Horace: Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (London: Heinemann, 1926), 170-75. This dilatory scepticism is given a more sympathetic treatment by Juan Luis Vives in *Anima Senilis*, where we are told that 'wisdom, self-control, dignity, moderation, stability and steadfastness of spirit in the pursuit of virtue' are all qualities in which old men 'surpass others'. In *Early Writings*, trans. and eds. C. Mattheuissen, C. Fantazzi and E. George (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), p. 99.

³⁶ *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 11.

The play presents an ideal, that of reason, in such a way that we must recognise its absolute claim on our moral allegiance, and then entirely subverts that ideal by demonstrating that its polar opposite is the only possible basis for action its protagonist is morally committed to perform.³⁷

Rabkin's Shakespeare, who 'presents a universe in which we must decide at every moment which way to choose, yet which tells us simultaneously that no choice is possible', is but an ahistorical version of Joel Altman's mentally dextrous Tudor subject, whose training in rhetoric enables him to 'simultaneously entertain two opposing points of view'³⁸ — 'to make one side of a debatable question seem as plausible as possible and then turn around and make the other side of the question seem just as plausible'.³⁹ Insofar as he borrows a term from modern physics ('complementarity') to describe the Shakespearean vision, Rabkin, in his turn, offers a more 'theoretical' interpretation of Benedetto Croce's Shakespeare, in whom 'positive determinations and negative ones maintain equal strength ... [and] tangle and clash with one another without becoming truly reconciled in a better harmony'. Shakespeare, according to Croce,

does not stand apart from these opposing emotions, from attraction and repugnance, from love and hate, from hope and despair, from joy and pain; but he stands apart from the unilaterality of each of these. He gathers them all unto himself, and not in order to endure them all and to shed tears of blood over them, but to form a single world out of them: the

³⁷ Ibid., p. 6. Graham Bradshaw's *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), provides a similarly 'ahistorical' account of the 'clash between concepts of "honour"' and a 'more comprehensive collision between incompatible views of Nature and value' in *Hamlet* (10). Although he does 'develop a distinction between terminal or dogmatic scepticism and ... radical scepticism', Bradshaw admits to having made 'little attempt to set Shakespeare's thought in the context of Renaissance ideas' (x-xi).

³⁸ Rabkin, *Common Understanding*, p. 7; Altman, *Tudor Play of Mind*, p. 32. See also Jonathan Bate's discussion of William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* in Chapter 10 of *The Genius Of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 1997), pp. 302-16 and *passim*. In this fascinating analysis of Empson's application of an 'uncertainty principle' to Shakespeare, Bate charts the development of Empsonian 'Ambiguity' — a concept he believes was influenced by the 'new physics' being practised at Cambridge in the 1920s. Ambiguity of the seventh type (often found in Shakespeare) involves a rejection of 'either/or' in favour of 'both/and' interpretations. Bate calls Empson 'Modernism's Einstein among literary critics' and his theory of 'both/and' the 'twentieth century's most powerful contribution to the understanding of Shakespeare' (316).

³⁹ Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 212.

Shakespearean world, which is the world of these unresolved opposites.⁴⁰

Tracing the chronological trajectory from Croce to Rabkin to Altman shows how commonplace assumptions about Shakespeare that are, essentially, humanist in persuasion, might be rewardingly historicised. The crucial point to be drawn from Rabkin's reading (for an argument involving Shakespeare's 'profound humanity' at least) is his insistence on the 'skeptical openness' apparent in Shakespeare. In the final analysis, he argues, *Hamlet* does not present a world in which nothing is valid. It is not as if neither of the play's opposing 'sets of values is based on reality — the cynical response; for better or for worse, both of them are'.⁴¹ In this respect, Rabkin's Shakespeare seems to work from ideological assumptions similar to those underpinning what Victoria Kahn calls 'Quattrocento' humanism. This academic scepticism is distinguished by Kahn from its later development into Pyrrhonism, in which the process of argumentation leading to the hallowed 'suspension of judgement' threatens to demolish *any* grounds for belief.⁴² For the Quattrocento humanists, by contrast, contradiction was a 'liberating rather than [a] demoralizing' force.⁴³

Kahn's distinction between 'demoralizing' and 'liberating' scepticism seems to me important. Rabkin's Shakespeare is obviously possessed of the latter; indeed, the whole idea of Shakespeare's 'skeptical openness' is clearly informed (at some level) by Rabkin's more intuitive perception of the playwright's optimistic generosity of spirit. It is Shakespeare's way to offer more rather than fewer alternatives than his audience can manage. His scepticism, Rabkin implies, is characterised by a belief in everything as opposed to nothing. Described in these terms, sceptical 'openness' resounds with all the 'buoyancy

⁴⁰ Benedetto Croce, 'Shakespeare's Poetic Sentiment', in *Benedetto Croce: Essays on Literature and Literary Criticism*, trans. M.E. Moss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 109.

⁴¹ Rabkin, *Common Understanding*, p. 9.

⁴² The likelihood of this happening was clearly recognised, though not necessarily condemned, by the Dutch neo-stoic Justus Lipsius, who, whilst admiring the ancient sceptics in his *Manuductio ad Stoicam Philosophiam* (1604), also wished that they had not been 'carried away by their zeal for debating things'. On Lipsius, and the ideological affinities he shared with Montaigne, see Richard Tuck, 'Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century', in Susan Mendus, ed., *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 21-35, at p. 23.

⁴³ Kahn, *Rhetoric*, p. 27.

and hopefulness', the 'extraordinary faith and energy' that literary historians often identify as the hallmark of humanism itself.⁴⁴

My approach to the implications of this scepticism will be both historical and ahistorical. Rather than simply rehearsing the idea that Shakespeare's humanist education equipped him with the ability to argue on both sides of the question, and can therefore be held responsible for the ambiguity characteristic of his drama, I also want to suggest that the deliberative declamation, so familiar to graduates of the Tudor grammar school system, provides a useful model for reading other, post-Tudor, critics, reading Shakespeare.⁴⁵ My object in undertaking this apparently anachronistic project is to stress the centrality of the role played by rhetoric in the construction of ethically loaded, potentially contradictory interpretations of actions or events. In order to lay the foundations for a historicised exploration of this ambiguity later in the thesis, this chapter will function as a kind of meta-deliberative declamation, the 'theame or argument' of which involves Shakespeare's 'profound humanity'. Its aim is to examine (in the words of Francis Bacon) the 'labours' of various 'persuaders' to make this profound humanity 'appear good or evil, and that in the higher or lower degree'.⁴⁶

And the first step in this project is to bring some precision to the meaning of the term 'profound humanity'. Would Shakespeare's possession of this quality have been recognised in his own day? Henry Chettle declared in 1592 that he himself had 'seen his demeanor no less civil than he excellent in the quality [i.e. theatrical work] he professes'; and in 1604 Anthony Scoloker referred to him as 'friendly Shakespeare'.⁴⁷ But can 'friendliness' really be taken

⁴⁴ The descriptions appear in Basil Willey, *The English Moralists* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 100, and Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 5.

⁴⁵ In 'The Moving Pattern of Shakespeare's Thought', in G.I. Duthie's collection of *Papers Mainly Shakespearean* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), James Sutherland suggests that Shakespeare's readiness to 'avail himself of any natural opening for a display of forensic eloquence', even at an early stage in his career, 'may be in part accounted for by the education in rhetoric that he, in common with other Elizabethan boys, had received at school, and to the keen interest in rhetoric that is so marked a feature of the age' (11). Sutherland gives eight examples (only two of which do not appear in the significantly 'public' context of the histories or the Roman plays) of Shakespeare's sustained 'interest in putting a case' (14).

⁴⁶ Bacon, *Colours of Good and Evil*, p. 97.

⁴⁷ The references to Chettle and Scoloker appear in Roland Mushat Frye's *Shakespeare: The Art of the Dramatist*, rev. ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 20. 'Quality' was a

as a synonym for 'profound humanity'? In his *Book Named the Governor*, under a section headed 'The three principal parts of humanity', Thomas Elyot wrote that:

The nature and condition of man, wherein he is less than God Almighty, and excelling notwithstanding all other creatures in earth, is called humanity; which is a general name to those virtues in whom seemeth to be a mutual concord and love in the nature of man. And although there be many of the said virtues, yet be there three principal by whom humanity is chiefly compact: benevolence, beneficence, and liberality, which maketh up the said principal virtue called benignity or gentleness.⁴⁸

The effort to return Shakespeare's 'profound humanity' to its historical context happily yields immediate results — bringing us into contact with what is surely the most common of all commonplaces relating to the playwright. Ben Jonson's notorious allusion to 'gentle Shakespeare' does indeed suggest that his possession of the 'principal virtue' of which 'humanity' consists is no mere bardolatrous invention of the twentieth century.

Evidence of Shakespeare's monopoly on 'benevolence' — which, as Elyot explains, 'if it do extend to a whole country ... is properly called charity' — is also assumed to abound. 'Most perceptible' in Shakespeare, from the early twentieth-century perspective of David Masson, was 'a magnanimity and moral elevation that are almost religious'.⁴⁹ J.I.M. Stewart thought he wrote 'as one good-hearted for the good-hearted', and called him a 'thoroughly wholesome person', in whose plays 'the air is clean, the soil sweet, and the plenty ... distinguishably God's'.⁵⁰ 'Too much has been made of "gentle" Shakespeare', decided Hazleton Spencer in 1940, when what really marks him out is a 'passionate admiration for the human spirit' and a 'deep pity for the lot of man'.⁵¹

standard term for the acting profession, as in Hamlet's question about the boy players: 'Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing?' (2.2.344-5).

⁴⁸ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, ed. S.E. Lehmberg (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1975), pp. 120-21.

⁴⁹ David Masson, *Shakespeare Personally* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914), p. 142.

⁵⁰ J.I.M. Stewart, 'Shakespeare's Men and their Morals', in John Garrett, ed., *More Talking of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1959), p. 127.

⁵¹ Hazleton Spencer, *The Art and Life of William Shakespeare* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), p. 46.

Spencer's 'essentialist' reading of Shakespeare's 'admiration for the human spirit' dovetails neatly with Thomas Elyot's evocation of the 'humanity' resident in those whose commitment is to 'mutual concord and love in the nature of man'. Any one of these laudatory observations, indeed, may be mustered in support of the case for seeing 'charity' as the virtue to which Shakespeare was by nature most inclined. J.I.M. Stewart's description of the cornucopian Shakespearean worlds in which the 'plenty' is 'distinguishably God's', is also a description of the special nature of Christian charity, which, alone among the virtues, 'admitteth no excess'.⁵² Likewise, it is not difficult to find in Henry Chettle's recollection of Shakespeare's 'civil demeanor', a reference to the 'charity' St. Paul described as 'not puffed up'; which '*Doeth not behave it selfe unseemly ... is not easily provoked, thinketh no evill*'.⁵³

Magnanimity, compassion, a predilection to 'think no evil' — these qualities slot together easily (and are perhaps most recognisable) as component parts of Christian charity. Yet none of them are exclusively 'Christian' virtues. Nor have they only ever been advocated or prized in specifically 'Christian' contexts. We come upon the decidedly un-Christian Aristotle, for instance, in Book I of the *Rhetoric*, recommending to his students a similar need to 'pardon human weaknesses'; to look

not to the action itself, but to the moral purpose; not to the part, but to the whole; not to what a man is now, but to what he has been, always or generally; to remember good rather than ill treatment, and benefits received rather than those conferred.

Injuries, he insists, should be patiently borne.⁵⁴ This sounds very much like a description of Christian charity, which 'suffereth long, and is kinde' (1.Cor.13:4).

⁵² 'So in all other excellencies', wrote Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*, 'though they advance nature, yet they are subject to excess; only charity admitteth no excess' (in Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon*, p. 263). For a discussion of Bacon's praise of charity, which associates his own philosophy with an 'extremity' of goodness far beyond the golden 'mediocrity' privileged in Aristotelian ethics, see Joshua Scodel, "Mediocrities" and "Extremities": Francis Bacon and the Aristotelian Mean', in David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, G.W. Pigman III and Wayne A. Rebhorn, eds., *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Binghamton, New York: 1992).

⁵³ King James Bible (1611), *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, XIII: 4-5 (italics mine).

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: Heinemann, 1926), 1.13.17-18.

But the principles Aristotle outlines here, ably assisted by the rhetorical figure *correctio*, do not pertain to charitable, but rather to equitable, conduct. Brought to bear in a legal context, they are principles adapted to dealing with individual cases that cannot be judged according to the inevitably rigorous precision of the law.⁵⁵ Equity (Gr. *epieikeia*, Lat. *aequitas*), as the ancient rhetoricians understood it, was a 'mitigating corrective to the generality and consequent rigidity inherent in the law. Designed, in contrast to legal statute, as a flexible measure, equity could take into account the infinite particularity of human events by investigating the agents' intentions and thus could accommodate each individual case'.⁵⁶

As well as pardoning human weaknesses, then, equity was concerned with the interpretation of the spirit rather than the letter of the law. Its strength as a legal concept, as W. Gordon Zeevald noted, derives from the fact that it makes sense both in the sphere of Aristotelian ethics, and in the Christian context of 'doing unto others what you would have them do to you'.⁵⁷ Although early modern interpretations of equity borrow from each of these contexts, they usually emphasise its value as a conduit for the delivery of 'merciful' judgements. Where the pagan philosopher Aristotle spoke of the 'sweet reasonableness' of equity, Christopher St. Germain referred in 1531 to the 'sweetness of [its]

⁵⁵ Aristotle's use of the rhetorical figure *correctio* — 'making straight', setting right': the correction of a word or phrase used previously — is especially significant in the light of his description of it, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, rpt. (London: Heinemann, 1975), as a tool for correcting or righting the 'generality' of laws. 'Equity', he writes, 'though just, is not legal justice, but a rectification of legal justice. The reason for this is that law is always a general statement, yet there are cases which it is not possible to cover in a general statement ... When therefore the law lays down a general rule, and thereafter a case arises which is the exception to the rule, it is then right, where the lawgiver's pronouncement because of its absoluteness is defective and erroneous, to rectify the defect by deciding as the lawgiver would himself decide if he were present on the occasion, and would have enacted if he had been cognizant of the case in question ... This is the essential nature of the equitable: it is a rectification of the law where law is defective because of its generality' (5.10.3-5).

⁵⁶ Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and its Humanist Reception* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 2.

⁵⁷ *The Temper of Shakespeare's Thought* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 143. Given his emphasis on the 'spirit' as opposed to the 'letter' of the law, Zeevald's claims lead naturally into a discussion of the coincidence of Christianity and equity as played out in the conducive contexts of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (pp. 159-84), and *The Merchant of Venice* (pp. 149-59). On Shakespeare's personal acquaintance with equity, as it functioned in the 'remedial' environment in the Court of Chancery, see W. Nicholas Knight, 'Equity, "The Merchant of Venice" and William Lambarde', *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974): 93-104. A rather less biographical account appears in E.F.J. Tucker, 'The Letter of the Law in *The Merchant of Venice*', *Shakespeare Survey* 29 (1976): 93-101.

mercy'.⁵⁸ Similarly, '*Aequum & bonum*' is described in William Fulbecke's classification of laws as that 'which doth mildly interpret, amend, and mollifie the hard and rigorous speaches and ansures of the other Laws'. 'Justice is rightly administered', he claims, 'when hatred is away and conscience is present, when rigor is tempered with mercy'.⁵⁹

Fulbecke's account shows the ease with which the New Testament principles of charity and mercy could be made to meet and inform the practical application of the law. Other early modern writers completed the same assimilative process but in reverse. Around half-way through *A Preparative to Contentation*, for example, John Carpenter introduces the legal concept of equity in order to add weight to his specifically Christian discourse. An 'extreme' kind of 'justice and discipline', that 'savour[s] little or nothing of *Equitie*', is thus held responsible for the decay of many kingdoms, and for the trouble that afflicts the church.⁶⁰ Because we are bound, both by charity and by equity, to 'bend to the best in everie deliberation', religious and legal doctrine appear in Carpenter's text as inextricably entwined. Little if any distinction is made between the equity whose purpose is to 'mildly interpret, amend, and mollifie' the harshness of unfeeling law, and the Christian charity which

wilt not admit that either those which slide of ignourance, infirmitie or feare, shoulde bee made publique examples of disgrace: or that whatsoever is eyther sayd, written, or wrought ... shoulde be wrested and urged with hard censures and like constructions: but rather, that the multitude of sinnes should be charitably covered, and all things taken in the better sence, and favourably construed.⁶¹

With these words Carpenter bids the *Preparative* goodbye, entrusting it willingly to the keeping and the 'right charitable constructions' of his dedicatee.

The name of the guardian of these pages is 'Theophilus' (literally 'the friend of God'), but this could quite easily be a pseudonym for Shakespeare, the

⁵⁸ Christopher St. Germain, *A Dialogue Betwixt a Doctor of Divinity and a Student in the Laws of England* (London, 1531), n.p.

⁵⁹ *A Direction or Preparative to the Study of the Law* (London, 1620), cited in Zeevald, *Temper*, p. 144.

⁶⁰ John Carpenter, *A Preparative to Contentation* (London, 1597), p. 89 (italics in original).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 'The Epistle Dedicatory'.

'bending author' offered up for approval by the Chorus at the end of *Henry V*.⁶² In addition to serving as a metaphorical bow, a humble expression of his gratitude to the paying public, Shakespeare's verbal self-portrait reflects suggestively on his own ability to 'bend to the best in everie deliberation'. His propensity to do so did not go unnoticed among his contemporaries, one of whom, in particular, was also unable to let it pass without reproof. This much is apparent from Ben Jonson's infamous reaction to Heminge and Condell's remarks (in the 'Epistle to the Reader' of the First Folio) on the undefiled nature of Shakespeare's scripts. 'I remember', says Jonson, 'the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to *Shakespeare*, that in his writing, (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, Would he had blotted a thousand'.⁶³ The account proceeds with a more personal reflection on Shakespeare: 'Hee was (indeed) honest', Jonson admits, 'and of an open, and free nature':

had an excellent *Phantsie*; brave notions, and gentle expressions: wherein hee flow'd with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stop'd: *Sufflaminandus erat*; as *Augustus* said of *Haterius* ... Many times hee fell into those things, could not escape laughter: As when hee said in the person of *Caesar*, one speaking to him; *Caesar thou dost me wrong*. Hee replied: *Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause*: and such like; which were ridiculous. But hee redeemed his vices, with his vertues. There was ever more in him to be praysed, than to be pardoned.⁶⁴

This recollection is generally construed as a sour criticism of Shakespeare's careless workmanship. Irritated by his prolific output, Jonson reinterprets Shakespeare's habit of 'never blot[ting] out line' as a sloppy unwillingness to return to the scene of his stylistic felonies, and turns Shakespeare himself into a comedy character who resists all efforts to shut him up. The man from Stratford is of course renowned for his literary fecundity. Terry Eagleton, for instance, has suggested that 'even those who know very little about Shakespeare might be vaguely aware that his plays ... are written with an

⁶² William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. T.W. Craik, rpt. (London: Routledge, 1995), Epilogue, l. 2.

⁶³ Ben Jonson, *Timber: or, Discoveries*, in C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, 11 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), VIII, p. 583.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 584.

extraordinary eloquence, one metaphor breeding another in an apparently unstaunchable flow of what modern theorists might call "textual productivity".⁶⁵ Given his materialist commitment to demystification, it seems unlikely that Eagleton *intended* to liken Shakespeare to the 'figurative' or 'metaphoricall' God presented in John Donne's 'Expostulation 19', in whose works '*types & figures* overspread all; and *figures* flowed into *figures*, and powred themselves out into *farther figures*'.⁶⁶ In suggesting that 'Shakespeare's own friends recognized that his pen often ran away with him', M.M. Mahood expresses a similar sentiment, in language colloquial enough to bring the playwright crashing back to earth.⁶⁷

Taking their cue from Jonson, however, remarks like these are seldom concerned with issues of quantity alone. As Neil Rhodes has argued, 'Jonson's account of Shakespeare links certain moral *qualities* of sincerity and frankness with the literary qualities of fertile imagination and stylistic copiousness'.⁶⁸ It is this connection that appears in embryonic form in John Dover Wilson's portrait of Shakespeare, whose frenzied attacks of creativity are evoked in close proximity to the warmth generated by his spontaneity and generous spirit of *joie de vivre*. The same thought apparently occurred much earlier to John Webster, who made mention, in the preface to *The White Devil*, of Shakespeare's 'right happy and copious industry'.⁶⁹

To return to Jonson, though, and his alleged attack on the 'slovenliness' which M.M. Mahood suggested 'cause[s] Shakespeareans most embarrassment'.

⁶⁵ Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 1.

⁶⁶ John Donne, 'Expostulation 19', in Anthony Raspa, ed., *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 99-100.

⁶⁷ 'Unblotted Lines: Shakespeare at Work', in Kenneth Muir, ed., *Interpretations of Shakespeare: British Academy Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 69. The 1972 British Academy lecture on Shakespeare.

⁶⁸ See the 'Coda': 'Freedom of Speech in Shakespeare', in Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), at p. 196 (italics mine). Along similar lines, the long central chapter on Shakespeare in William Flesch's *Generosity and the Limits of Authority: Shakespeare, Herbert, Milton* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), offers a sustained treatment of the idea that language intensifies in inverse proportion to the (material) resources of its speakers. Though Lear, Antony, and Richard III all suffer an end to their prosperity, each attempts to continue 'giving' — a generosity which can now only be expressed through the grandiosity of their language. On Jonson's own ideal of artistic freedom of expression, 'which he identified with the norm of Greek and Roman theatre', see Janet Clare, 'Jonson's "Comical Satires" and the Art of Courtly Compliment', in Julie Sanders, Kate Chedzoy and Susan Wiseman, eds., *Refashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics and the Jonsonian Canon* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

⁶⁹ In F.L. Lucas, ed., *The Complete Works of John Webster*, 4 volumes (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), I, p. 108.

Offered in the introduction to her 1972 birthday lecture, this observation is followed by the inevitable reference to Jonson's criticism of 'such lines as "Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause" — which, if Shakespeare wrote it at all, was blotted into better sense before ever *Julius Caesar* was printed'. More willing than her critical forbears to appreciate this 'facility', Mahood proposes that 'Shakespeare's headlong method of composition has wider consequences for his art than the odd solecism or syntactical tangle'. She proceeds to argue that his 'cheerful ad-libbing' provides 'evidence, not so much of Shakespeare's absent-mindedness, as of the presence of an exploring and adventurous mind'.⁷⁰

This account offers another way of reading Jonson's criticism without questioning the nature of the criticism itself. That Jonson's chief objection was to Shakespeare's habit of writing sentences *sans* sense is still taken for granted. The assumption is a common one, but it ignores the significance of Jonson's descriptive terminology, and indeed, of the example he chooses to cite. Jonson suggests that the stylistic freedom or largess which effortlessly produced an abundance of (specifically) 'gentle' expressions can be read as a moral quality — a generosity of spirit, he implies, that is revealed in this rather clumsy attempt to excuse Caesar. Shakespeare's voracious writerly activity, moreover, is heavily underlined by both Jonson and Webster, who might therefore be assumed to pronounce him free from 'the disease of weake unbusied people, who being not furnished with abilitie for other employment ... delight to be doing what is moste easie, to censure others'. Writing in 1633, Samuel Torshell, the diagnoser of this insidious social sickness, goes on to lament the sad lack of 'mercie in our Reports'; that 'we care not how we wound the reputations and teare the credits of men not offending. There is but little charitie', he adds, 'where there is an aptnesse to entertaine all loose and scandalous reports, and to scatter them as busily as we greedily entertained them'.⁷¹

Torshell's prognostication of the ill effects arising from idleness sheds new light on Shakespeare's peculiarly 'gentle' industry. The virtue of 'gentleness', as Thomas Elyot explained, is comprised of several parts, one of which is benevolence or 'charity' — the only virtue that 'admitteth no excess'.

⁷⁰ Mahood, 'Unblotted Lines', pp. 69, 76 and 70.

⁷¹ Samuel Torshell, *The Saints Humiliation* (London, 1633), p. 49.

As someone remembered, specifically, for never being 'unbusied', Shakespeare also seems to be miraculously immune to the disease which afflicts such people. Jonson's description of him as a prolific producer of 'gentle' expressions implicitly credits Shakespeare with 'mercie' and 'charitie' in lawful superabundance. This reflection on the playwright's capacity for forgiveness is tellingly consolidated with an acknowledgement of his adherence to the spirit of equity. If he is witness to an accusation of wrong-doing on the part of another, Jonson suggests, Shakespeare's immediate reaction is to 'think no evill' — to protect the reputation of the defendant by arguing the justness of his individual 'cause'. Instinctively siding with the beleaguered party, Shakespeare 'mitigates and mollifies the hard and rigorous speeches and ansures' directed at the accused. In other words, Shakespeare's copy is 'fair' in more ways than one.

As is invariably the case when he speaks of Shakespeare, Jonson's attitude to him is hard to infer. His equally notorious eulogy, 'To the memory of my beloved, the Author Master William Shakespeare', nonetheless prompted a confident accusation of animosity from John Dryden, to whom the tribute appeared 'insolent, sparing and invidious'.⁷² Such epithets do not seem so appropriate here. The Shakespeare who inhabits this memoir, I would argue, is presented instead as a compulsive, vaguely absurd dealer in extenuation — as one by whom even the most objectionable behaviour is 'favourably construed'. The comment reveals as much about Jonson as Shakespeare, of course. As anecdotal evidence, its real value lies in Jonson's rather uncharitable suggestion that his friend's defence of Caesar is worthy of ridicule. Whether intentionally or not, Jonson's reconstruction of events sets up an opposition, wherein he and certain like-minded contemporaries unite in mocking poor Shakespeare's sympathetic tolerance of risibly untenable positions.

In this respect, Shakespeare seems to stand at a remove from the cynical Jonson, and the unnamed others whose laughter joined his own. Even so, it would be wrong to imagine sympathy of this kind as uniquely 'Shakespearean'. A similar principle is perceptible in the work of one other writer in particular —

⁷² On Dryden and various other critics who have 'question[ed] the presence of substantive content in [Jonson's] praise', see Barbara L. DeStefano, 'Ben Jonson's Eulogy on Shakespeare: Native Maker and the Triumph of English', *Studies in Philology* 90 (1993): 231-45.

a writer William Empson described, significantly in this context, as a 'double ironist', whose technique as an author (A) is to show 'both B and C that he understands both their positions'.⁷³ While Shakespeare's religious convictions continue to excite critical controversy,⁷⁴ this second writer's tolerant optimism can be linked more directly to his belief in the tenets of a particular strain of Christianity. The writer in question is Henry Fielding; an ethics of 'benevolence' and 'good nature' preached by the early modern latitudinarian tradition, the background against which he must be read.⁷⁵

What can be learned from a comparison between Shakespeare's apparent willingness to take things 'in the better sence' and a similar tendency in Fielding? After all, the novelist was writing a century and a half later and within a rather different religious context. Not Shakespeare but Fielding admitted the impact upon him of Issac Barrow, the seventeenth-century Anglican divine, whose teachings emphasised 'a kind of universality in the matter of [the good man's] beneficence'.⁷⁶ Not Shakespeare but Fielding openly endorsed a specifically latitudinarian view of charity, in which the extension of 'a "general kindness" to all men because they are men' held equal sway with the donation of financial gifts designed to relieve the suffering of the parish poor.⁷⁷ Most importantly, if R.S. Crane is correct in seeing latitudinarianism as a product of the Restoration,

⁷³ William Empson, 'Tom Jones', in Harold Bloom, ed., *Henry Fielding* (New York, New Haven and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1987), p. 18.

⁷⁴ For a survey of recent scholarship, and an analysis of the impact on Shakespeare studies of 'revisionist versions of Protestant consensus', see Donna B. Hamilton, 'Shakespeare and Religion', in W.R. Elton and John M. Mucciolo, eds., *The Shakespeare International Yearbook* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 187-202.

⁷⁵ R.S. Crane, 'Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the "Man of Feeling"', *English Literary History* 1.3 (1934): 205-30, at p. 207. Crane's article provides a particularly well-sourced account of eighteenth-century latitudinarianism, which he suggests is a product of the combined influence exerted by numerous Anglican divines on the ethical and psychological thought of the period 1660-1725. A thorough discussion of Fielding's relation to this tradition is given by Martin C. Battestin, in *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of 'Joseph Andrews'* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), especially Chapters 1-3.

⁷⁶ Battestin, *Moral Basis*, p. 18.

⁷⁷ Crane, 'Suggestions', p. 211. See also Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), especially Chapter 7, 'The Poor and the Parish'; and Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Hill discusses the rapidly changing attitudes to charity, and its decline, in the first half of the seventeenth century, from a virtue 'holier than hope or even faith' to 'a crust of bread handed to the poor man at the gate' (220). Conversely, Andrews's concern is with the mid-eighteenth-century outpouring of charitable assistance; with charity in its more tangible and practical forms: 'the "Inclination to promote Publike Good"' as opposed to simple 'benevolence' (5). Henry Fielding's active support of The Foundling Hospital and The Lying-In Hospital are discussed briefly in Chapters 2 and 3.

the articles of this particular religious doctrine were being disseminated far too late to have influenced the thinking of Shakespeare at all.

This notwithstanding, admirers of this 'kindest' of playwrights have often spoken as though his work provides evidence of an enduring belief in this very faith.⁷⁸ Indeed, a sample from Crane's list of eighteenth-century latitudinarian buzzwords — 'humanity', 'good nature', 'universal benevolence' — reveals the extent to which this is so.⁷⁹ The recurrence of these terms in criticism of Shakespeare suggests that, if latitudinarian charity had not eventually come to exist, then Shakespeareans would have had to invent it. If for no other reason than this, a brief exploration of 'charity' as handled by Fielding, is surely worth undertaking.

In the middle of Book II of *Tom Jones*, Captain Blifil, brother-in-law to Squire Allworthy (the eponymous hero's adoptive father) engages that man in a discussion on this very topic. Armed with 'great learning', Blifil proceeds to 'prove' to the philanthropic Allworthy 'that the word *charity*, in Scripture, nowhere means beneficence or generosity':

'The Christian religion', he said, 'was instituted for much nobler purposes, than to enforce a lesson which many heathen philosophers had taught us long before, and which, though it might, perhaps, be called a moral virtue, savoured but little of that sublime Christian-like disposition, that vast elevation of thought, in purity approaching to angelic perfection to be attained, expressed, and felt only by grace. Those (he said) come nearer to the Scripture meaning, who understood by it candour, or the forming of a benevolent opinion of our brethren, and passing a favourable judgment on their actions; a virtue much higher, and more extensive in its nature, than a pitiful distribution of alms, which, though we would never so much prejudice, or even ruin our families, could never reach many; whereas charity, in the other and truer sense, might be extended to all mankind.'⁸⁰

Blifil is not lying. His 'proof' really does derive from the eulogy to charity delivered to the Corinthians by St. Paul. 'Though I bestowe all my goodes to feed the poor', the apostle tells them, 'and though I give my body to bee burned,

⁷⁸ See the epigraph from Robert Kimbrough at the head of this chapter.

⁷⁹ Crane, 'Suggestions', p. 211.

⁸⁰ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. R.P.C. Mutter, rpt. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 73.

and have not charitie, it profiteth me nothing'.⁸¹ But the devil can cite scripture, as the 'Reader' exercising his 'Judgment' in this matter is presumed by Fielding to understand.⁸² Paul maintains that benevolent opinions and favourable judgements must accompany alms-giving; Blifil says they should replace it. And by attempting to persuade Allworthy to abandon his habit of supporting foundlings like Tom, Blifil certainly intends to 'profit' himself in no small measure. 'Prejudicially' and deliberately paving the way of his own family to bankruptcy is, in Blifil's view, the least harmful consequence of such generosity. Worse by far is the moral culpability that must attach to a benefactor if it transpires, later, that the object of his open-handed bounty is actually unworthy of that favour. Such "examples must greatly lessen the inward satisfaction, which a good man would otherwise find in generosity", he declares:

'... nay, may even make him timorous in bestowing, lest he should be guilty of supporting vice, and encouraging the wicked; a crime of a very black dye, and for which it will by no means be a sufficient excuse, that we have not actually intended such an encouragement; unless we have used the utmost caution in chusing the objects of our beneficence.'⁸³

'Supporting vice', 'encouraging the wicked', committing crimes of 'a very black dye' — surely these are not faults of which the altruistic Allworthy is guilty? Perhaps not. Fielding, at any rate, obviously considers his reader wise enough to detect the self-interested bias of Blifil's account. The judicious reader is also expected to recall the alacrity with which the Captain spreads damning reports about his neighbours; in short, that the concept of 'forming a benevolent opinion of our brethren, and passing a favourable judgment on their actions' is, to Blifil, completely alien. In response to Allworthy's favourable interpretation of

⁸¹ King James Bible (1611), *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, XIII: 3. Tim Parks refers to this verse in an erudite essay on the subject of 'charity' in which he recalls being puzzled by it as a child, until someone explained to him that 'charity meant "love" not charity as we now use the word'. See his *Adultery and Other Diversions* (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 98-9.

⁸² Fielding presents the chapter as 'Containing much Matter to exercise the Judgment and Reflection of the Reader'. On the novel's interest in the problems of assessing evidence and passing judgements, and the connection of this to Fielding's own position as a magistrate, as well as to the activity of 'criticism' in general, see Matilda Snow, 'The Judgment of Evidence in *Tom Jones*', *South Atlantic Review* 48.2 (1983): 21-36.

⁸³ Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 73.

alms-giving, Blifil proposes an alternative view of charity that he personally knows nothing about. But this is not the end of Blifil's contribution to the dialogue. And the prediction he offers with regard to the possible outcome of such charity cannot be so easily dismissed. That this worse-case scenario might actually happen is certainly feasible; that it *might* is enough, and cannot, of course, be proved. Almost imperceptibly, Blifil shifts his ground as he continues speaking, supplementing his use of the present tense with a few strategically placed examples of the future conditional. His pessimistic forecast need only be *satis probable*, which it evidently is, for Allworthy, though renowned for his slowness to 'believe anything to [another's] disadvantage',⁸⁴ dispatches an employee to check up on the moral conduct of one particular object of his beneficence.

So what exactly is happening here? At one level we are simply eavesdropping on part of a conversation between two men, one of whom is an eloquent parasite with a sharp eye for the main chance. Another way of reading the exchange is as a debate, whose 'theme or argument' is 'should a man show charity?', and to which is brought, by one of its disputants, a 'great learning' that consists primarily of an ability to argue convincingly on the negative (undoubtedly more difficult) side of this question. Once made, Blifil's uncharitable construction of charity cannot be unmade, and is left hanging, pregnantly persuasive, in the air. What is proven by his argument is that the virtue of charity — which involves giving the most favourable interpretation available to any act or event — is itself capable of being construed in a better or a worse sense.

Published in the middle of the eighteenth century, *Tom Jones* plays out a dilemma upon the horns of which certain Shakespeareans of the period found themselves stuck. Influenced by the eighteenth-century latitudinarian tradition, Fielding was an advocate of what Martin Battestin approvingly described as 'liberal' or 'complacent' moralism.⁸⁵ This moral tolerance is the animating principle behind the character of Squire Allworthy, in whom we find traits not dissimilar to the ones Fielding's contemporary, Samuel Johnson, found in

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁸⁵ Battestin, *Moral Basis*, pp. 13 and 15.

Shakespeare — traits which make him concerned rather to please than to instruct; most comfortable when giving the benefit of the doubt; apt to find a bright side upon which to look.⁸⁶ In a lecture delivered to the British Academy, Michel Grivelet defined this impulse as a form of 'open-minded generosity'.⁸⁷ 'Shakespeare, though not unaware of the dangers of bestial degradation', he noted, commenting on the questionable conduct of some of Shakespeare's earliest creations, is 'capable of smiling upon the vagaries of man, less prepared to be systematically censorious of them'.⁸⁸ On the three hundredth anniversary of the dramatist's death, J.F.A. Pyre presented this capacity as evidence of his subject's profound humanity. 'Whilst others approach Shakespeare in shrewdness of observation and analysis', he argued, there are none who are so 'intimate and kindly ... Many escape his humour, and some his sublimity; there are few who do not yield their worship to his divine tenderness'.⁸⁹

Here Pyre speaks in the awful tones more suited to religious reverence of the 'kindly' 'tenderness' to which Samuel Johnson had given a far more sinister twist. Willing to concede Shakespeare's several excellencies, Johnson is more depressed by the dangerous implications of his 'open-minded' tolerance. He is convinced, in fact, that contact with Shakespeare too often results in his readers' own powers of 'observation' being in some way disabled or impaired. Blinded by the dancing reflections produced by decades of critical acclaim, 'We fix our eyes upon his graces, and turn them from his deformities, and endure in him what we should in another loathe or despise'.⁹⁰

Gone from this chilling description is Ben Jonson's amusingly

⁸⁶ Predictably enough, Johnson was no fan of Fielding's, and sometimes grew almost violent in his condemnation of *Tom Jones*. "I am shocked to hear you quote from so vicious a book," he once scolded Hannah More, who said that this was "the only occasion of Johnson's being really angry with her". "I am sorry to hear you have read it: a confession which no modest lady should ever make. I scarcely know a more corrupt work." Cited in Christopher Hibbert, *The Personal History of Samuel Johnson* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 322 n.9.

⁸⁷ 'A Portrait of the Artist as Proteus', in Kenneth Muir, ed., *Interpretations of Shakespeare: British Academy Shakespeare Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 44. From the lecture of 1975.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸⁹ J.F.A. Pyre, 'Shakespeare's Pathos', in *Shakespeare Studies; by Members of the University of Wisconsin to Commemorate the Three-Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of William Shakespeare, April 23, 1616* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1916), p. 77.

⁹⁰ Samuel Johnson, *Preface*, in R.W. Desai, ed., *Johnson on Shakespeare*, 2nd edn. (London: Sangam Books, 1997), p. 120.

sympathetic Shakespeare, an ambiguous figure enough, but one in whom there was 'ever more ... to be praysed, than to be pardoned'. Suddenly, a man whose 'faults [are] sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit' appears in his stead. He it is who 'sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose'; he who makes 'no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked'; he who 'carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance'. Shakespeare has other faults; his plots are baggy and his comic characters boorish. But it is to such defects as Johnson mentions first that he believes 'may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men'.⁹¹

'Evil' is a word seldom applied to William Shakespeare, and its appearance here might well remind us of Blifil's *satis probabile* account of the potentially deleterious effects of charity. Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare's failure to make a 'just *distribution* of good or evil' is a resonant echo of Blifil's objection to the reckless lack of caution Allworthy shows in 'chusing the objects of [his] beneficence'. Like Blifil, Johnson regards such indiscriminate generosity as tantamount to 'encouraging the wicked'.

Reading Ben Jonson's account of Shakespeare in *Timber* alongside Samuel Johnson's in the *Preface* thus produces a radically unstable image of the playwright which pulls in diametrically opposed directions. Each Jo(h)nson, first Ben then Samuel, presents an different interpretation of the same subject: Shakespeare's penchant for extenuation. We may therefore imagine them as opponents in a deliberative declamation; the 'two schollers' appointed to argue pro and contra Shakespeare's charitable compulsion to smile indulgently on human failings. 'In deliberatives', we recall, according to Francis Bacon, 'the point is, what is good and what is evil, and of good what is greater, and of evil what is the less'.⁹² Presenting the case *for* Shakespeare, Ben shows 'of evil what is the less, and of good what is the greater' ('redeemed his vices, with his virtues'). Samuel, presenting the case *against* him, shows 'of evil what is the

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 105.

⁹² Bacon, *Of the Colours of Good and Evil*, p. 97.

greater, and of good what is the less' ('faults ... sufficient to ... overwhelm ... merit').

In the context of this 'virtual' deliberative, both 'persuaders' labour to win support for their case by appealing to their readers' emotions. Referring in a benignly mocking, almost condescending tone, to Shakespeare's curious but basically harmless behaviour, Ben Jonson encourages the formation of 'calm and gentle' emotions (*ethos*), thereby coaxing his readers into 'a feeling of goodwill'. The eighteenth-century persuader's methods are very different. Aggressively stacking Shakespeare's defects one on top of another, then using the emotive word 'evil' to cap this list, Johnson stirs up the more hostile, violent emotions (*pathos*), associated with 'anger, dislike, [and] fear'.⁹³ And as if this *elenchus* were not convincing enough, Samuel seems intent on overturning Ben's claim that there was 'ever more in [Shakespeare] to be praysed, than to be pardoned'. Where Ben seizes the opportunity afforded by deliberative discourse to highlight Shakespeare's 'virtue', Samuel argues, on the contrary, that such praise is often 'given by custom and veneration' and is therefore not deserved at all.⁹⁴

He was not the first to have said so. Some half dozen years earlier, Oliver Goldsmith launched his career in literature with *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*. Devoted to an investigation 'Of the Stage', its twelfth chapter reveals the budding dramatist's hostility toward various (expediently anonymous) theatre managers, who pander to public taste by rejecting new plays in favour of 'old pieces'. Must we be forever condemned to witnessing the 'absurdities' of Shakespeare, he asks, and, clearly conscious of the irreverence of such a question, continues:

Let the reader suspend his censure; I admire the beauties of this great father of our stage as much as they deserve but could wish, for the honour of our country, and for his honour too, that many of his scenes were forgotten. A man blind of one eye should always be painted in profile. Let the spectator who assists at any of these new revived pieces only ask himself whether he would approve such a performance if written by a modern poet; if he would not, then his applause proceeds

⁹³ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1920-21), II, 6.2.9; 6.2.6-7.

⁹⁴ Johnson, *Preface*, p. 120.

merely from the sound of a name and an empty veneration for antiquity.⁹⁵

Unlike his yet-to-be recognised contemporary, however, Johnson had no axe to grind with timorous theatre managers. Thus free from the personal venality of Goldsmith's, his own interest in the powerful influence of 'custom and veneration' is one of the most important aspects of his critique. The way Johnson saw it, Shakespeare failed to 'show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked' because he was too busy giving such wicked offenders the benefit of the doubt. And what is worse, his readers proceed to compound this 'evil' by themselves excusing what could just as easily be seen (and Johnson does see) as a serious moral failing. The fault that they would loathe in another, they tolerate or even applaud in Shakespeare. Why? Simply because he *is* Shakespeare, and his every stroke has already been sanctioned by the weight of 'custom and veneration'. 'If we endured without praising', Johnson continues:

respect for the father of our drama might excuse us; but I have seen, in the book of some modern critic, a collection of anomalies which show that he has corrupted language by every mode of depravation, but which his admirer has accumulated as a monument of honour.⁹⁶

If Johnson's palpable yearning to dismantle this 'monument of honour' sounds strangely familiar, then that is because it has been more recently articulated (though couched in different terms) by cultural materialist critics working primarily in Britain from the middle of the 1980s. On the face of it, Johnson's eighteenth-century editorial project has little in common with cultural materialism's 'decanonization of Shakespeare as a cultural token'.⁹⁷ Surely the doctor's attitude to his subject is well removed from the reaction of 'radical'

⁹⁵ Oliver Goldsmith, *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (London, 1759), p. 169.

⁹⁶ Johnson, *Preface*, p. 120.

⁹⁷ Don E. Wayne, 'Power, Politics, and the Shakespearean Text: Recent Criticism in England and the United States', in Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 51.

critics to “‘Shakespeare’: the cultural construction, the ideological force, the myth’?”⁹⁸

Or is it?

Johnson’s withering allusion to the preposterously bardolatrous findings which formed the bulk of the ‘modern critic’ John Upton’s *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* (1746) suggests that he was already acutely aware of the ideological importance of ‘Shakespeare’ — where that word is ‘less the name of a specific historical figure, than a sign that has come to designate a vaguely defined, but fiercely defended, set of characteristics that function as the touchstone of value for what we commonly call the “English literary tradition”’.⁹⁹ As if reluctant even to countenance such muddle-headed asininity, Johnson rather surprisingly leaves the specific details of his objection to Upton’s project vague. It is not clear whether Upton is taken to task for his inability to recognise ‘bad’ Shakespeare, or even to believe in its existence, or for using Shakespeare as an advertisement to promote what Johnson therefore feels doubly driven to renounce as ‘bad’. Less ambiguously conveyed is the editor’s troubled realisation that ‘evil’, or at least ‘corruption’ and ‘depravation’, could be at best effectively extenuated, and at worst fashioned into a ‘monument of honour’, by a simple demonstration of its connection to ‘Shakespeare’: the ‘touchstone of value’, the long-established arbiter of all that is good and noble.

In the same way that Johnson spoke of the pernicious ability of ‘custom and veneration’ to make virtues out of vices, cultural materialists dwell on the process by which a ‘dominant ideology’ naturalises its own unjust, and frequently violent, oppressive and inhumane behaviour. This goes on, they say, both within and outside the boundaries of the Shakespearean text. So it is that the Venetian state presented in *Othello* ‘claims a monopoly of legitimate violence’, where ‘the exercise of that violence is justified through stories about the barbarity of those

⁹⁸ Graham Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare: Essays in the Shakespeare Myth* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), p. 5.

⁹⁹ James H. Kavanagh, ‘Shakespeare In Ideology’, in John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 144. Terry Eagleton, in his ‘Afterword’ to *The Shakespeare Myth*, ed. Graham Holderness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), suggests similarly that ‘All of the writers in this book are alert to the fact that Shakespeare is today less an author than an apparatus — that his name ... is merely metonymic of an entire politico-cultural formation, and thus more akin to “Disney” or “Rockefeller” than to “Jane Smith”’ (204).

who are constituted as its demonised others'.¹⁰⁰ So it is that the Right Honourable Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer in Margaret Thatcher's early 1980s government, invoked Shakespeare in support of Conservative fiscal policy; justifying very *dishonourable* cuts to the health service and a reduction in taxation on the rich by quoting directly from Ulysses's speech on degree.¹⁰¹ Polemical attacks on this abuse of Shakespeare are frequently (and often correctly) read as timely responses to contemporary political events. Yet it seems clear from his iconoclastic attitude to Upton's 'monument of honour' that Johnson knew in the eighteenth century what Graham Holderness is proud to announce as the discovery of 'radical' criticism at the beginning of the twenty-first. That far from making us 'wise, and good, and free', "Shakespeare" can ... operate to delude, to corrupt and to enslave'.¹⁰²

Samuel Johnson is not ordinarily noted for his radical or dissident readings of 'Shakespeare' or the Shakespearean text, but he did have experience in speaking successfully on behalf of 'the opposition'. Indeed, he positively revelled in being given occasion to do so. Glancing back, later on in life, at the adventures of his youth, Johnson remembered how he 'used always to choose the wrong side of a debate, because most ingenious things (that is to say, most new things) could be advanced upon it'.¹⁰³ Contrary by nature, Johnson's desire to argue on the 'wrong side' of the Shakespeare question might therefore be seen as a solo effort to end what Francis Bacon called 'the reign or tyranny of custom',¹⁰⁴ by kicking down the monument built in Shakespeare's honour, and grinding the rose-coloured glasses of 'custom and veneration' to dust beneath his famously gigantic foot. Although in many ways profoundly conservative, Johnson's own clear-headed scepticism with regard to myth-making and sentimentality means

¹⁰⁰ Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 34.

¹⁰¹ See Margot Heinemann's now classic essay 'How Brecht Read Shakespeare', in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

¹⁰² Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare*, p. 5. Various dubious Tory appropriations of Shakespeare are discussed by Richard Wilson, in 'NATO's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription', in John J. Joughin, ed., *Shakespeare and National Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997).

¹⁰³ Cited in Hibbert, *Personal History*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁴ Francis Bacon, 'Of Custom and Education', in John Pitcher, ed., *Francis Bacon: The Essays* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 179.

that he shares some common ground with more radical iconoclasts. His 'alternative' interpretation of Shakespeare's sympathetic or generous tolerance, especially, anticipates the 'new' ideas advanced on this topic in the 1970s — not only by practitioners of political literary criticism, but by radical, politically oriented dramatists such as Edward Bond.¹⁰⁵

The comparison is strange enough to require explanation. To argue convincingly that Bond's radical take on Shakespeare was influenced by him, rather than by social and political theories inherited from Marx, would surely have taxed the ingenuity of Johnson himself, however experienced an antagonist he was. Be that as it may, Bond's 'concern with the inter-relation of past, present and future' — sparked by his reading of twentieth-century materialists or not — was a subject to which Johnson had already given serious thought.¹⁰⁶ As we have seen, Johnson was quite as aware as Bond that the 'past often works as a myth on the present'.¹⁰⁷ And although neither knew the same 'present', both understood the influence upon it that 'Shakespeare' had. In Johnson's case, this consciousness takes the form of an attack on Upton's reverential partial-sightedness with respect to the Bard. In the case of Bond, it finds imaginative expression in the demystificatory strategies set to work in plays such as *Lear* and *Bingo*. If Bond demonstrates in the earlier play 'the imperative need to avoid comfortable acquiescence in Shakespeare's conclusions',¹⁰⁸ he shows in the latter an analogous need to resist the comfortable conclusions reached by the establishment on 'Shakespeare' himself. By attempting to 'look beyond the myth of the "sweet swan of Avon" retiring to the bosom of his family at the end of his

¹⁰⁵ In his 1987 investigation of the 'new directions in Shakespeare studies', Walter Cohen admits that his adoption of 1980 as a point of departure may appear arbitrary, 'and would seem still more so if [its] bibliography also included articles, many of which date from the 1970s', but goes on to contend that, in England, 'where leftist cultural criticism developed earlier [than in the United States], 1980 nonetheless represented a significant point of demarcation, with an intensified radical response to the recent victory of Thatcher, the extension of this work to Renaissance literature, and the publication of an important Marxist study of Middleton'. See his 'Political Criticism of Shakespeare', in Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987). Although avowedly Marxist, Bond's 'critical' response to Shakespeare obviously falls outside Cohen's remit.

¹⁰⁶ On Bond's indebtedness to Marx and others, see David Hirst's introductory remarks ('Points of Departure') in *Edward Bond* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 4ff.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Bond to Tony Coult, dated 28th July 1977. Cited in Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, *Bond: A Study of his Plays* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 179.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

career',¹⁰⁹ Bond signals his independence from those who 'fix [their] eyes upon [Shakespeare's] graces, and turn them from his deformities, and endure in him what [they] should in another loathe or despise'.¹¹⁰

Utterly devoid of sentiment, then, this sober re-presentation of Shakespeare's final sojourn in Stratford challenges the (often equally 'creative') readings offered by the 'sweet swan's' less sceptical admirers. Among these may be counted John Masefield, who, writing only a decade before the first performance of *Bingo*, takes a typically benign view of Shakespeare's filial attachments. 'Of the home, we know nothing', he admits, 'except that place and inmates were dear to him; he held by them and returned to them'.¹¹¹ It is exactly this kind of conclusion that Bond seems determined to upset. In the absence of evidence to the contrary (and sometimes in the face of it) Masefield automatically assumes that Shakespeare 'the man' showed kindness and compassion to all those whose lives he touched. Such conclusions are based on a preconceived belief in what Hazleton Spencer saw as Shakespeare's 'passionate admiration for the human spirit' and his 'deep pity for the lot of man'. And sure enough, Masefield's account of this happy family sounds entirely plausible when Shakespeare is himself presented as a 'genius', who 'by some startling mercy could perceive, and in undying words set down the eternal marvel of man's life that is so splendid, so passionate and so short'.¹¹²

A deep-seated desire to re-describe this 'startling mercy' — figured variously as 'charity', 'generosity', and so on — to underline its status as a paradoxically nefarious myth, appears in Bond's work as well as in Johnson's. Out of apparently incommensurable projects emerges an homologous understanding of the role and responsibility of the writer in society. The eighteenth-century critic delivers his verdict on this subject in a characteristically brusque fashion. Shakespeare's habitual sacrifice of virtue to convenience is indefensible, according to Johnson, even if allowance is made for the barbarity of Shakespeare's age. No matter when or where he depletes his reservoir of ink, 'it

¹⁰⁹ Hirst, *Edward Bond*, p. 38.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, *Preface*, p. 120.

¹¹¹ John Masefield, *William Shakespeare*, quatercentenary edn. (London: Mercury Books, 1964), p. 3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. x.

is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent of time or place'.¹¹³ A remarkably similar vision of the writer's 'duty' propels the action, or more properly the lack thereof, in *Bingo*. Here the question 'Was anything done?' is repeatedly asked of Shakespeare, the play's protagonist, who is unable to say honestly that anything was.

Both critics, then, are demonstrably conscious of an abdication of responsibility on the part of Shakespeare. For Johnson, he fails to deal adequately with his things of darkness, whose reproachable conduct is eventually casually dismissed. Bond is likewise troubled by the 'convenience' of Shakespeare's denouements. Content to admire the dramatist's 'intellectual strength and passionate beauty', his quietist 'solutions and, in particular, "the reconciliation that he created on the stage"' are rejected by the radical playwright as 'totally dishonest'.¹¹⁴ In *Bingo*, 'Shakespeare' assumes physical dimensions, and the implications of his complacent dismissal of people and problems are unflinchingly played out. The ability Keats found in Shakespeare to 'make all disagreeables evaporate' may have struck Edward Bond with its 'beauty', but neither he nor Johnson would have vouched for its 'truth'.¹¹⁵

One way of approaching Bond's alternative interpretation of 'Shakespeare' is to liken it to other political readings given in the specific field of (British) English literary criticism. Bond's fighting talk would certainly sound an appropriate note on a field Don Wayne has noticed 'periodically takes on the appearance of a battleground on which a struggle is waged for control of the representational power of texts that are understood to be the nation's cultural patrimony — for better or worse!'.¹¹⁶ It is not difficult to imagine Bond embroiled in such a dispute, flanked on either side by materialists, all firing alternative versions of 'Shakespeare' at their idealist foe. To do so is easy, but, with scarcely any more effort, his radical reading of Shakespeare might be re-inscribed within a much earlier, classical tradition. Bond's oppositional strategy

¹¹³ Johnson, *Preface*, p. 105.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Christopher Innes, 'The Political Spectrum of Edward Bond: From Rationalism to Rhapsody', in John Russell Brown, ed., *Modern British Dramatists: New Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1984), p. 143.

¹¹⁵ Keats, in Bate, ed., *Romantics*, p. 198.

¹¹⁶ Wayne, 'Power, Politics, and the Shakespearean Text', p. 52.

has at least as much in common with what Samuel Johnson identified as the argument advanced on the 'wrong side' of the question. And indeed, it is not in Marx or even Althusser, but rather in Cicero, that we find a blueprint for what Bond is doing.

Entering at Chapter thirty-eight of the *De Partitione Oratoria*, we interrupt the two Ciceros, junior and senior, towards the end of a pedagogical exercise designed to untangle the labyrinthine complexities of legal cases. Cicero the younger requests a more detailed account of how to proceed in cases 'when the dispute turns on something in a written document'.¹¹⁷ 'The rules as to a disputed meaning are common to the two opponents', his father answers:

Each will maintain that the interpretation on which he himself will base his case is worthy of the intelligence of the writer; and each will maintain that the meaning that his opponents will say is to be derived from an ambiguous phrase in the document is either absurd or useless or unfair or disgraceful.¹¹⁸

Cicero's advice to his son emphasises perfectly the extent to which 'interpretation is by and large adversarial, an antagonistic affair'.¹¹⁹ One need only remove the two Ciceros from the specific arena of their hypothetical court of law, and substitute for their 'written documents' the plays of Shakespeare, to appreciate the essential communality between this classical process of argumentation and the contentious materialist agenda. Uninterested here in Shakespeare's 'intelligence', Bond aims to expose and reject the idealist vision of generous Shakespeare as an 'absurd' interpretation of the written documents available — an interpretation that is both 'unfair' and 'disgraceful'.

Seeing idealist and iconoclast as opponents in a meta-deliberative declamation on the subject of 'generous Shakespeare' allows us to draw another illuminating parallel. If the *Partitione* acknowledges the existence of contested meanings, the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* provides needful instructions on how to treat them. This advice is given in Book III of the

¹¹⁷ Cicero, *De Partitione Oratoria*, in *De Oratore Book III, De Fato, Paradoxa Stoicorum, De Partitione Oratoria*, trans. H. Rackham, 2 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1948), II, 38.132.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and its Humanist Reception* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 2.

Ad Herennium, where the topics of deliberative speech are also divided. Chapter three focuses more specifically on the technique most likely to successfully undermine the case for praising an action that appears to embody an indubitable virtue. In order to gain a hearing for this underdog case, the *Ad Herennium* recommends that the speaker try to show that the actions his opponent considers honourable and praiseworthy actually deserve to be seen in a completely different moral light. 'If it is at all possible', the speaker should 'show that what [his] opponent calls justice is cowardice, and sloth and perverse generosity'; 'what [his opponent] declares to be temperance [he] shall declare to be inaction and lax indifference'.¹²⁰ Just as if the defenders of Shakespeare's generosity were his opponents, and he their plucky adversary, Bond proceeds in *Bingo* to show exactly that.

The play opens in 1615-16; the scene is an empty garden in Warwickshire. Shakespeare enters, sits down on a bench, and begins to read some papers. An old man beside him trims the hedge. Apart from him, the retired playwright is alone. Before long he is approached by a wandering woman, who peers over the gate and holds out her hand. Assured she would prefer money over food, Shakespeare runs back inside to root out his purse; with this 'glib gesture of charity' his open-handed liberality is established.¹²¹ A little later we discover Shakespeare deep in contemplation — agonising over the sins of his past. This time he is accompanied by an elderly female employee (the gardener's wife) who querulously comforts him with her own impression of his good-heartedness: 'No, no. Yo'yont named for cruelty. They say yo'm a generous man. Yo' looked arter me an' father. Give us one a your houses t' live in'.¹²²

Responding to the only kind of charity she knows — the kind that puts money in her purse — the old woman rehearses an assumption about Shakespeare that Bond presumably wants us to realise is both hollow and unfounded. Bond's inclusion of the conversation between Shakespeare and the

¹²⁰ *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, rpt. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.3.6.

¹²¹ Hay and Roberts, *Bond*, p. 184.

¹²² Bond, *Bingo*, 1.3.

old woman is crucial to his project. It comes shortly after the playwright is accused by his daughter, Judith, of ignoring the people he lives with — of sneering at their opinions, and of failing even to register the fact that his wife lies ill in bed (1.2).

These indictments are writ large on the background of a political dispute over land. Very early in the play, William Combe, one of Stratford's large landowners, pays Master Shakespeare a visit — the purpose of which is to ensure that Shakespeare (as one of the town's biggest rent holders) will not oppose his plan to 'get rid of' short lease tenants, stake out new fields, and enclose them behind hedges and ditches.¹²³ Combe promises to guarantee Shakespeare against financial loss in return for an understanding: that he will not 'support the town or the tenants' (1.1). Far from opposing them actively, however, Shakespeare is advised to 'ignore them', to be non-committal, and to stay in his garden. By doing so he avoids passing judgement on the matter, defers his decision *ad infinitum*, and finally, like Hamlet, 'let[s] be'. In a controversy over fences, in other words, Shakespeare can frequently be found astride one. The phrase 'Nothing's decided' echoes dully throughout the play.

This policy of non-intervention also operates outside the realm of business and finance. Soon after Shakespeare has supplied the young woman with food, money, and the promise of a job, she is caught with her skirt up in the bushes, gainfully employed with the gardener (himself an erstwhile recipient of Shakespeare's liberality). Judith is enraged by this impudence but Shakespeare does not care. His daughter's instinctive reaction is to situate this 'irresponsible' inertia in the realm of ethics: to let be, in this case, she implies, makes him 'morally as guilty as they are' (1.2).

By turning 'Shakespeare' into the protagonist of *Bingo*, Edward Bond radically undermines some of earlier criticism's most ingrained, cherished, and tacitly held assumptions. Presented in unfamiliar surroundings, as an influential Stratford burgher and a disenchanted husband and father, Bond's world-weary Shakespeare is manifestly *not* a nice person. Instead of embodying 'the most

¹²³ For a 'non-fictional' account of the controversy over the Welcombe enclosures see Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: Records and Images* (London: Scolar Press, 1981), pp. 72-92.

impetuous tide of warm-blooded humanity that ever beat through the heart of man',¹²⁴ he admits to despising his daughter — not even with a passion, but with a malignant, 'cold and formal hatred'.¹²⁵ Most ruthlessly demolished by Bond is the commonplace elision of the two different meanings of the word 'generosity'; the obfuscatory semantic slippage which led mid-twentieth-century critics like Hazleton Spencer to ponder, whimsically, whether Shakespeare, 'like John Webster', was 'generous to his brother poets in thought and utterance? ... Did his hand fly to his pocket, or could he steel his heart, when misery in Shoreditch rags told a hard-luck story and held out a shaking claw?',¹²⁶

Spencer's final touch, the addition of the quivering talon, is, perhaps, a little excessive for even the most sentimental of tastes. But the point is that such questions could never be asked by someone even vaguely uneasy about receiving the wrong answer. In this reading, Shakespeare's 'uncommonly sweet nature' acts as a guarantor for his financial munificence.¹²⁷ The resulting image of 'Shakespeare the benefactor' is then automatically fed back into the already fixed one of 'Shakespeare the merciful'. The two concepts reinforce each other; and the end product is a composite picture of an incontrovertibly 'generous' man. Bond's representation of a Shakespeare whose financial generosity is offset by his total lack of 'profound humanity' breaks open this carefully constructed hermeneutic circle. *Bingo* begs the question of whether the generosity regarded for centuries as Shakespeare's trademark (appearing here as his neutrality over the enclosures and his reluctance to punish 'sinners') might not be read instead as a species of what the author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* called 'lax indifference'. Bond's Shakespeare does less than he should, and far less than he can.

¹²⁴ Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare*, p. 10.

¹²⁵ Bond, *Bingo*, 2.5.

¹²⁶ Spencer, *Art and Life*, p. 3. Katherine Duncan-Jones makes certain not to blur this distinction in her own recently published biography, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001). In the preface to this text Duncan-Jones emphatically denies 'that any Elizabethans, even Shakespeare, were what might now be called "nice" — liberal, unprejudiced, unselfish' (x). And, indeed, she proceeds to find evidence of Shakespeare's reluctance to 'divert much, if any, of his considerable wealth towards charitable, neighbourly or altruistic ends' (xi). The appearance of this disclaimer early on in the study leaves the way clear for her to find, in Shakespeare's *plays*, 'a widespread endorsement of devotion, charity and kindness, and an equally widespread condemnation of impiety, selfishness and greed' (196).

¹²⁷ Spencer, *Art and Life*, p. 46.

What is at stake here has as much to do with nomenclature as ethics. *Bingo* is important to this argument because it lays bare the representational strategies by which generations of critics sought to explain, or attempted to neutralise, the ambiguities they discovered in Shakespearean drama itself. 'It may almost be said to be the rule', argued J.I.M. Stewart, that when Shakespeare's characters 'come hard up against a moral problem proper — a moral dilemma or hard choice — the dramatist finds some means to let them off. The issue is suspended, dissolved or dodged; some theatricality, some trick of distraction is brought in. Even in *Measure for Measure*, the play most commonly cited in arguments here, the dramatist is thoroughly evasive in the end'.¹²⁸

Thus, Bond's portrayal of a Shakespeare who, as his daughter Judith complains, 'shields' transgressors, and whose reaction to the moral dilemma of the enclosures is to 'Wait and see', emerges in Stewart's analysis as a dramatist well-schooled in the art of letting people off — of suspending, dodging or dissolving ethical conundrums.¹²⁹

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to convey some sense of how very different modes of critical inquiry might lead to the drawing of very similar conclusions. Stewart's account surely calls for the re-entry of Norman Rabkin's Shakespeare, who is possessed of 'skeptical openness', though here in an entirely positive sense which emphasises his generous tolerance towards different points of view. This makes him the antithesis of the old men whose refusal 'to utter their opinion in anything' might be understood as what Stephen Toulmin called 'destructive nay-saying'. In an account of humanism which embraces the work of Erasmus, Montaigne and Shakespeare, Toulmin suggests that the writings of these men display

¹²⁸ J.I.M. Stewart, 'Shakespeare's Men and their Morals', in John Garrett, ed., *More Talking of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1959), pp. 125-6.

¹²⁹ George K. Hunter has also suggested that many of Shakespeare's plays (*Love's Labours Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* among them) 'end with epilogues or throwaway final lines that transcend by evading the points at issue'. Hunter's essay is more subtly nuanced in other respects, however, and links this 'transcendence' to the 'ethical polyphony' encouraged by the humanist dialogue form and by the early modern habit of arguing *in utramque partem*, as explored by Joel Altman in *The Tudor Play of Mind*. For Hunter's comments on Altman, and for a discussion of the related techniques of orator and playwright, see his 'Rhetoric and Renaissance Drama', in Peter Mack, ed., *Renaissance Rhetoric* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 112 and *passim*.

the urbane open-mindedness and skeptical tolerance that were novel features of this new lay culture. Their ways of thinking were not subject to the demands of pastoral or ecclesiastical duty: they regarded human affairs in a clear-eyed, non-judgmental light that led to honest practical doubt about the value of 'theory' for human experience.¹³⁰

Out of this intellectual climate is born Shakespeare's contention that 'Caesar did never wrong but with just cause' — a claim that seems to arise naturally from the humanist culture whose optimism was based, according to Arthur Kinney, on the belief that 'all things could be mended'.¹³¹

This humanist belief in amelioration points to the fundamental affinity between a rhetorical openness which encouraged receptivity to different points of view and the more specifically moral qualities of tolerance, generosity, and what Thomas Lovell Beddoes was to call, simply, 'kindness'. In his 'Lines Written from Switzerland' Beddoes laments the passing of an age of poetic 'Truth', chronicled by 'kind Shakespeare, our recording angel', whose 'kindest' imaginings are rejected in favour of alternative forms of literature — the 'sermon and the scandalous paper' preferred by those whose 'velvet day-bed' is always 'novel strewn'.¹³²

The playwright's refusal to sermonise is of course renowned. 'He deals with morals always; but as a moralist, never', claimed Stewart. 'No man had less desire than Shakespeare to point the moral, and none a deeper desire to paint it', argued Edgar Fripp.¹³³ Exploiting an image of Shakespeare to which we will return, Fripp's point/paint pun explicitly allies the dramatist's painterly proficiency with his anti-didactic leanings. The fact that we 'are not merely taught by him, but *are taught without knowing it*', is, in Fripp's opinion, a 'point' in Shakespeare's favour.¹³⁴

Not so in the opinion of Samuel Johnson, as we have already seen. Nor in the opinion of a contemporary of his, the blue-stockings Elizabeth Griffiths,

¹³⁰ Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 25.

¹³¹ Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, p. 36.

¹³² 'Lines Written in Switzerland', in Judith Higgins, ed., *Thomas Lovell Beddoes: Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1976), pp. 48-50.

¹³³ Edgar I. Fripp, *Shakespeare: Man and Artist*, rpt., 2 volumes (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), I, p. 70.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, (italics in original).

who would clearly have swapped any amount of sophisticated painting for just a few monochromatic examples. This much is apparent from Mrs Griffiths's description of her authorial task as an effort to place Shakespeare's 'Ethic merits in a more conspicuous point of view'.¹³⁵ Abundance, not dearth, has hampered her progress. The real difficulty, she admits, has been what to choose, and sometimes, how to separate the moral from the matter, amidst such a 'profusion of sweets, and variety of colours'.¹³⁶ Mrs Griffiths may have borrowed the idea of Shakespeare's 'garden' from Samuel Johnson, but her intention is clearly to perform what another Jonson, again Ben, saw as every speaker's duty: to present his subject so that 'his hearer may take knowledge of his discipline with some delight'; to extract his examples from the 'rough and brake seats, where they lay hid and overgrown with thorns, to a pure, open and flowery light, where they may take the eye and be taken by the hand'.¹³⁷

As the author of *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated*, Mrs Griffiths obviously assumes the role of chief illustrator (modelled on Late Latin *illustrator* 'one who enlightens'). Treating the canon as a kind of commonplace book, Mrs Griffiths deals primarily in 'invention' — 'the power' that Cicero claimed 'investigates hidden secrets';¹³⁸ and by searching Shakespeare's 'places' she engages in the process of dis-covering, or bringing to light, the 'moral' specimens which had, until then, lain unseen.¹³⁹

This is an ambitious project and Mrs Griffiths fares badly. By the time she reaches *The Comedy of Errors*, the lady is resolved to 'take no further notice of the want of a moral fable in the rest of these plays', having already been

¹³⁵ Elizabeth Griffiths, *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971), p. ix.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Ben Jonson, 'Reading, Speaking and Writing Well', in Ralph S. Walker, ed., *Ben Jonson's Timber or Discoveries* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1953), pp. 47-8.

¹³⁸ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J.E. King (London: Heinemann, 1927), 1.25.61.

¹³⁹ In his discussion of Agricola's use of rhetorical 'places', Walter Ong shows how the Latin term *silva* (woods, brush, forest), and its Greek cognate, influenced the notion of 'loci' through the Renaissance tradition. 'Rhetoricians tend to think of the "matter" of discourse in terms of a woods [*sic*], to be dealt with by a process of "sorting out" or "cutting out" or "arranging"'. The relation of the 'woods' to the places of 'invention' is made manifest, as Ong points out, in the title of Jonson's own commonplace book, *Timber, or Discoveries upon Men and Matter as They Have Flowed Out of His Daily Readings*. See Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 116-21, at pp. 118-19.

disappointed by this same deficiency in her first four attempts.¹⁴⁰ Fatigued but not broken, Mrs Griffiths boldly presses on, and, in spite of early indications, obviously does find matter enough to keep herself amused. For it is not until page 468 that she pauses, briefly, to give an account of 'moral writers' in general. Of the two classes of philosophy into which such a writer can fall, she claims, 'Our author represents it more impartially, neither inclining to one side or the other'. As an explanation of Shakespeare's slippery moral system, though, the playwright's 'unparticipating aloofness' (so crucial to later writers such as Coleridge) leaves Mrs Griffiths cold.¹⁴¹ A few pages later finds her couching the problem in different terms: 'Shakespeare's faults arise from richness not from poverty', she announces. 'They exceed, not fall short; his monsters never want a head, but have sometimes two'.¹⁴²

This aspect of Shakespearean drama poses a problem for Mrs Griffiths that is remarkably similar to the one her near-contemporary Henry Fielding encouraged the readers of *Tom Jones* to consider. Faults that 'arise from richness' and a penchant for 'excess' — are not these the very same 'failings' that Captain Blifil told Squire Allworthy were concomitant to supporting the vicious and the wicked, and consequently, to condoning crimes of a 'very black dye'?

Writing in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Mrs Griffiths is already relying heavily on the economic lexicon to which many of her successors would also turn, and which Edward Bond so intransigently exposed. The Shakespeare manufactured by liberal humanist critics such as E.E. Stoll, whose 'vices, like his virtues, are those of exuberance', and whose 'artistic virtues are positive, opulent, redundant, not negative or corrective, frugal or austere', is incipient in Mrs Griffiths's account of a playwright whose 'generosity' knows no

¹⁴⁰ Griffiths, *Morality*, p. 56.

¹⁴¹ On Coleridge see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 20. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century J.R. Seeley said that 'From Shakespeare, no doubt, the world may learn, and has learnt, much; yet he professed so little to be a teacher, that he has often been represented as almost without personal opinions, as a mere undisturbed mirror, in which all Nature reflects herself'. Cited in C.E. Hughes's compilation, *The Praise of Shakespeare: An English Anthology* (London: Methuen, 1904), p. 272.

¹⁴² Griffiths, *Morality*, p. 487.

bounds.¹⁴³ Just as Allworthy (all-worthy but not at all discerning) could be accused of having exercised little 'caution' in choosing the 'objects' of his 'beneficence', so too has Shakespeare (generous, literally, to a fault) been unable to resist giving even the most monstrous of his creations an entire extra head.

Hindsight should allow us to feel sympathy for this hard-working literary lady, herself confused by the 'profusion of sweets, and variety of colours' she has encountered in Shakespeare. If her assessment of the playwright anticipates that of Stoll (who is apparently more sure of his moral footing) it also looks forward to the Shakespeare discovered by Norman Rabkin, whose approach to the construction of moral ambiguity involves his provision of too many alternatives, as opposed to too few.

The connection between Shakespeare and generosity is long established. Indeed, the *OED* finds two separate meanings of the word *generous* to be of Shakespearean coinage.¹⁴⁴ One of my objectives in this chapter has been to survey the range of early modern contexts in which 'generosity' was either advocated or prized. Though these contexts are many, it would be wrong to suppose that 'generosity' in its broadest sense was universally valued or even condoned. Thomas Elyot, with whose definition of 'humanity' we began this chapter, understood the ease with which the associated virtues of benevolence, beneficence and liberality could be made to leak into one another; that 'inasmuch as liberality wholly resteth in the giving of money, it sometime coloureth a vice'.¹⁴⁵ In a letter to his son, Denzil Holles evinces a similar uneasiness about the potentially dangerous consequences of generosity, advising him to 'let [his] hospitality be moderate, according to the measure of [his] revenues', and noting, enigmatically, in the manner of Polonius, that 'many consume themselves with secret vices and their hospitality must bear the blame'.¹⁴⁶

This recognition of the questionable virtue of generosity exists alongside the exhortations to charitable or equitable conduct directed at early modern

¹⁴³ Elmer Edgar Stoll, *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare: A Study in Dramatic Contrast and Illusion*, rpt. (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 50.

¹⁴⁴ **generous** 1.a. Of noble lineage; high born; 2.a. Of actions, character, etc.: Appropriate or natural to one of noble birth. Both references are to *Love's Labours Lost* (1588).

¹⁴⁵ Elyot, *Governor*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁶ Holles is cited in Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 227.

subjects from a variety of quarters. On the face of it, the distinction between financial and moral generosity is easily made: while the value of the first may be questioned, the value of the second surely cannot. Taking Shakespeare's own legendary 'generosity' as an example, I have attempted to show that it can be questioned; it is and was. In the case of Shakespeare, part of this perceived ambiguity must be related to the specific exigencies of time and place. Johnson's mistrust of Shakespeare's tendency to smile benignly upon human failings may be explained, in part, as one aspect of a more general intolerance to anti-didactic writing, associated especially, perhaps, with a peculiarly eighteenth-century understanding of the function of literature.

But by reading Johnson alongside Bond, I hope I have shown that this ambiguity cannot be dismissed entirely as a function of historical change. One of the central contentions of this thesis is that the practice of 'forming a benevolent opinion of our brethren', or interpreting their actions in the 'better sence', was regarded with equal if not greater suspicion by commentators in the early modern period. Towards the end of Act I of *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare's own Olivia provides the sullen, anti-social Malvolio with an emphatic definition of this kind of generosity; the kind with which much of this argument will be concerned. 'To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition', she reminds him, 'is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets'.¹⁴⁷ My aim in what follows is to demonstrate the intractable ambiguity inherent in such 'charitable constructions' — the apparent desirability of which seems beyond doubt. I will continue, as I have here, to stress the centrality of the role played by rhetoric in the formation and interpretation of these favourable or unfavourable judgements. What happens when 'generous' or 'mild' interpretations of actions are used (to adapt the words of Thomas Elyot) to 'colour a vice', is a subject to which we will return in Chapter II.

¹⁴⁷ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds. J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997), 1.5.90-93.

Chapter II

Wanton Pictures

Yet canst thou,
(Great Master though thou be) tell how
To paint a virtue?¹

Lately resurrected from his dusty medieval grave, the celebrated poet Gower begins the third Act of Shakespeare's *Pericles* by exhorting the assembled company to concentrate on the matter about to unfold. Having left the eponymous hero and his new bride Thaisa ascending the stairs to bed, the audience is asked to jump forward in time to a point at which the product of their royal union, a daughter named Marina, has already been delivered. In the manner of Cleopatra, who fills the 'gap of time / [Her] Antony is away' by inventing stories about him,² the audience of *Pericles* is told to 'Be attent, / And time that is so briefly spent / With your fine fancies quaintly eche'.³ The theatrical experience thus described is a wholly interactive affair. For the play to succeed, each individual audience member must use his 'fancy' to 'supplement' or 'augment' the events being staged before him.⁴ A similar courtesy is expected from the audience of *Henry V*, witnesses whose 'thoughts' are needed first to 'deck our kings', and who are later urged to 'Still be kind, / And eke out our performance with your mind'.⁵ Only imagination can atone for the fact that plays last hours, not months or years; without it, a stage incapable of receiving a 'fleet majestic' will always seem bare.

Of paramount importance in the theatre, the ability to call upon one's fancy to fill in the blanks is no less necessary in other, non-dramatic, contexts.

¹ Thomas Carew, 'To the Painter', in Rhodes Dunlop, ed., *The Poems of Thomas Carew: With his Masque Coelum Britannicum*, rpt. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 106.

² William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 1.5.5-6.

³ William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, ed. F.D. Hoeniger, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997), 3.0.11-13.

⁴ Hoeniger glosses *eche* supplement, augment; an old spelling of 'eke'. C.T. Onions's *Shakespeare Glossary*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), gives *eche* 'to eke out' and *eke* 'to increase, add to'; 'to supplement' (pp. 66-7).

⁵ William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. T.W. Craik (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 'Prologue', l. 28 and 3.0.34-5.

As a process wherein the imagination is used to supplement tangible facts, 'eching' also plays a significant part in biographical writing. Pausing a third of the way through her pseudo-biography of Orlando, who is, for a time at least, a rough contemporary of Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf makes a mock apologia for her botched attempts to 'piece out a meagre summary' of her subject's life. As a biographer struggling with scanty or illegible documentary evidence, Woolf finds it incumbent upon her 'to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination'.⁶

A figure far more famous than Orlando, William Shakespeare has forced a similar response from even the most painstaking of researchers. Mindful, perhaps, of the poet's posthumous proscriptions against tampering with his *physical* remains, William Neilson and Ashley Thorndike present their biographical endeavour as an effort 'to clothe the naked skeleton of the documented facts'.⁷ Equally willing to 'eke out' so fragmentary a life as Shakespeare's, Katherine Duncan-Jones admits to having 'risk[ed] conjecture, in the hope of putting some spectral, or speculative, flesh on those well guarded bones'.⁸ A common and closely related variation on this metaphor imagines the biographer/critic as a painter. So it is that John Dover Wilson launches his 'Biographical Adventure' with a statement of his intention to 'begin by sketching [the] background first, not neglecting the central figure entirely, but showing it in outline only and leaving the details of posture, costume, face and expression to be filled in later'.⁹

Signalling his plan to 'draw' then 'clothe', the intrepid Dover Wilson splits the biographical project into two clear stages. Voluntary confessions like his help explain how Shakespeare's life, so much of which is 'shrouded in mystery', has little by little been 'dressed up with myth'.¹⁰ As if naturally

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. Brenda Lyons (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 84.

⁷ William Allan Neilson and Ashley Horace Thorndike, *The Facts About Shakespeare* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), p. 46.

⁸ Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), p. x.

⁹ John Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare: A Biographical Adventure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 14.

¹⁰ Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1997), p. 5.

repulsed by the prospect of 'eching', literary explorers such as Park Honan have beaten a rather different path to the treasure that is 'Shakespeare'. In his own recent investigation, Honan covertly but firmly reverses the popular parallel by referring to the biographer's task as an effort 'to collect what is known about the playwright, to synthesize it, and in a sense to clean the bones of the "Shakespeare documents" or to separate facts from myths and errors'.¹¹ In Honan's project supplementation gives way to refinement. Here the onus is not on augmenting but on paring down and stripping away.¹² This rationale seems to reject by association (as scholarly bad practice) what Antony Burgess called 'the right of every Shakespearean who has ever lived to paint his own portrait of the man'.¹³

Embedded in these various accounts of sketching, painting, dressing and fleshing are connotations of filling in, padding out, and even (when we allow for 'conjecture') making it up.¹⁴ Appearing on the very first page of his biography, Honan's implicit self-exoneration is important because it functions, ironically, to dissolve the affinity between his own working practice and the working practice favoured by the very object of his study. No proponents of Samuel Schoenbaum's understanding of biography as, 'by and large, a prosaic endeavor',¹⁵ other Shakespeareans (less bashful about their own creative artistry)

¹¹ Park Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. ix.

¹² In this respect his methodology has much in common with the 'new' approach to biography initiated at the beginning of the twentieth century by writers such as Lytton Strachey, who, in the preface to *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918), declared that 'it is not [the biographer's] business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case as he understands them ... To quote the words of a Master — "Je n'impose rien; je ne propose rien; j'expose"' (ix).

¹³ Antony Burgess, *Shakespeare* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 6. The curious but intriguing *locus classicus* of the adding flesh/colouring in parallel may perhaps be discovered in Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*, trans. A.L. Peck (London: Heinemann, 1943). Speaking of the embryonic formation of blooded creatures, Aristotle tells us that in 'the early stages the parts are all traced in outline; later on they get their various colours and softnesses and hardnesses, for all the world as if a painter were at work on them, the painter being Nature. Painters, as we know, first of all sketch in the figure of the animal in outline, and after that go on to apply the colours' (2.6.20-25).

¹⁴ Introducing himself as a 'student artist', Frank Harris vehemently refutes the implication that his own portrait of Shakespeare is in any way fictitious. As if to distance himself from Cromwell's biographer, Carlyle, who was 'too romantic an artist, too persuaded in his hero-worship to discover for us [his subject's] faults and failings', Harris assures us that, in his text, Shakespeare will be presented, 'sweet gentleness', 'giant vices' and all, 'as he really was'. *The Man Shakespeare and his Tragic Life Story* (London: Frank Palmer, 1909), pp. xv-xvii.

¹⁵ S. Schoenbaum, 'Looking for Shakespeare', in Philip H. Highfill, Jr., ed., *Shakespeare's Craft: Eight Lectures* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), p. 172.

have often painted a picture of a poet and playwright who is himself renowned for painting pictures.

Their ability to do so is predicated on an idea with a very long history. The concept itself is generally thought to derive from two classical sources: Horace's reference in the *Ars Poetica* to *ut pictura poesis* — 'A poem is like a picture', and the saying attributed by Plutarch to Simonides that 'painting [is] inarticulate poetry and poetry articulate painting'.¹⁶ Or, in the words of Matthew Coignet, that a 'Painting is a dumme Poesie, and a Poesie a speaking painting: & the actions which the Painters set out with visible colours and figures the Poets reckon with wordes, as though they had in deede beene perfourmed'.¹⁷

The culture that produced Matthew Coignet also produced Michel de Montaigne, who claimed in his essay 'On Experience' that 'all things are connected by some similarity'.¹⁸ A culture founded upon such a premise was unlikely to challenge the classical assumption that there 'is no art which is not either the mother or the relative of another'.¹⁹ On the contrary, it embraced the correspondence with a warmth often verging on the fiery. Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century, in other words, 'attitudes to literature and painting were deeply informed by the belief in an essential commonality between the arts'.²⁰ 'Poesy ... is an art of imitation', wrote Philip Sidney, 'for so Aristotle

¹⁶ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, in *Horace: Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (London: Heinemann, 1926), 361; Plutarch, *On the Fame of the Athenians*, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, 14 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1936), IV, 347. See also the description in the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, rpt. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), of the figure *commutatio*: 'when two discrepant thoughts are so expressed by transposition that the latter follows from the former although contradictory to it' (4.28.39). The phrase 'A Poem ought to be a painting that speaks; a painting ought to be a silent poem' is given in illustration of this figure.

¹⁷ Matthew Coignet, *Politique Discourses on Trueth and Lying*, trans. E. Hoby (London, 1586), in G. Gregory Smith, ed., *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), I, p. 342.

¹⁸ *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 1213. On the early modern passion for building complicated systems of correspondence see Neil Rhodes, 'Articulate Networks: the Self, the Book and the World', in Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday, eds., *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁹ Tertullian, *De Idololatria*, trans. J.H. Wasziuk and J.C.M. Van Winden (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), 8.3.

²⁰ Alison Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking Through Language* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), p. xii.

termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth — to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture'.²¹

In Chapter I, I attempted to lend some historical significance to the idea of Shakespeare's 'profound humanity'. This Chapter will follow a similar pattern, though here I wish to return to Edgar Fripp's claim that 'no man had less desire than Shakespeare to point the moral, and none a deeper desire to paint it'.

If we are happy to grant the *OED* authority, Shakespeare's interest in 'painting' might be better described as 'seminal' than 'pronounced' or even 'intense'. Nobody before Shakespeare, according to this piece of scholarly apparatus, had used the word 'picture' to signify 'a graphic description, written or spoken, capable of suggesting a mental image, or of imparting a notion of the object described'.²² Whether the attribution to Shakespeare is correct, however, is of less interest than the context in which the word is said to occur. Best known, perhaps, for the strain its verbal athleticism places on the ear, *Love's Labours Lost* is also replete with allusions to the 'eye' or 'eyes' — words used more frequently here than anywhere in Shakespeare save *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.²³ It is in the park surrounding Navarre's seat of masculine learning and abstention that this alleged first citing (or sighting) of the word 'picture' appears.

Unlike Oberon's forest, Navarre's academy is not haunted by mischievous spirits scattering magic dust. Thus in many ways very different, the forest and the academy are each home to inhabitants whose visual perception is shown to be in some way confused or flawed. Called upon at the beginning of act five to present her lover's 'favour', Rosaline produces verses by Berowne: 'I

²¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, rpt. (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967), p. 101. The idea that classical theories of imitation might encourage the drawing of parallels between the arts is suggested by Kathy Eden, in *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Eden argues that Aristotle departed in the *Poetics* from Platonic tradition by redefining imitation and elevating it to a first principle of artistic production. 'Regarded in a technical sense as the artist's tool, equivalent to the hammer with which a carpenter constructs his "object," *mimesis* serves as an instrument in fictional construction where the object is human action' (69). See also R. McKeon, 'Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity', *Modern Philology* 34 (1936): 1-35.

²² picture 4.a. fig.

²³ The fact that *Love's Labours Lost* is teeming with references to the eyes is pointed out by Frank Kermode in *Shakespeare's Language*, (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p. 59.

am compared to twenty thousand fairs', she announces, 'O, he has drawn my picture in his letter!'. 'Anything like?', asks the Princess, with impeccable comic timing. 'Much in the letters', replies the raven-headed beauty; 'nothing in the praise'.²⁴ However genuine or well-intentioned, then, this courtly missive is notable only for its signal failure to convey any accurate information about its subject at all. Berowne's 'picture' is as far from 'speaking' as the brooch given to the Princess by the King of Navarre. Shakespeare's use in this play of the word 'picture' to denote a 'graphic description ... capable of suggesting a mental image' is actually a kind of anti-example — evoked as if on purpose to stress the limitation of the idea.

Verging on the derisive, if not on the spiteful, the ladies' reaction to Berowne's declaration of affection emphasises the gulf separating this smitten amateur from the 'best Historian' of yore, who, according to Francis Junius, could 'adorne his Narration with such forcible figures and lively colours of Rhetorike, as to make it like unto a Picture'.²⁵ Berowne has failed miserably to reach the goal held in common by artist and writer, namely, to 'make the reader a spectator'.²⁶

Responses to Shakespeare's own creation of pictorial vividness are invariably more positive than that occasioned by the defective daubings of his hapless courtier Berowne. 'Never was a world so vivid, so pictorially distinct, as that of Shakespeare's plays', enthused David Masson in 1914. 'You see everything that can be seen — individual objects, glitteringly clear in form and colour; expanses, landscapes, cities, streets, sea shores, the sea itself':

²⁴ William Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, ed. H.R. Woudhuysen (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1998), 5.2.37-40.

²⁵ Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients*, eds. Keith Aldrich and Philipp and Raina Fehl (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), p. 49. Edited according to the text of Junius's own 1638 translation of Plutarch.

²⁶ Plutarch, *On the Fame of the Athenians*, 347. In the preface to his translation of Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* (1695), John Dryden gave a similar account of the specific connection between the artist and the writer, going on to praise Thomas Otway's expertise in this area: 'To express the Passions which are seated in the Heart by outward Signs, is one great Precept of the *Painters*, and very difficult to perform', he noted. 'In *Poetry*, the same Passions and Motions of the Mind are to be express'd; and in this consists the principal Difficulty, as well as the Excellency of *that Art* ... we call it the Gift of our *Apollo*: not to be obtained by Pains or Study, if we are not born to it'.

Sound, too, is incessant in this world, from the purling of brooks and the whispering of leaves, and the singing of small birds, to the thunderous noise and uproar; it is full, as well, of odours and tastes; and all can be struck or touched.²⁷

Masson's ebullient appreciation of Shakespeare's living worlds is of a piece with Sir Joshua Reynolds's description of Shakespeare as a 'faithful and accurate painter of nature'.²⁸ Together they evoke an idea of the playwright to which critics have often returned. Like the idea of generous Shakespeare (examined in the previous chapter) this concept has proven amazingly durable. Shakespeare's special aptitude for pencil drawn characters was noted by the first generation German Romantic writer Ludwig Tieck in 1794, and again, without substantial variation, by T.J.B. Spencer almost two hundred years later.²⁹ Taking the analogy a stage further, eighteenth-century commentators William Warburton and Lord Lyttleton recognised both the verisimilitude captured in Shakespeare's 'just and lively paintings', and their astounding breadth of range.³⁰

This final pair of observations must, of course, be read in terms of the historical context from whence they came; a period during which the production of *actual* Shakespearean painting was at its most intense. James Barry's graphic realisation of Lear and Cordelia, Hogarth's of characters from *The Tempest*,

See J.C. Ghosh's edition of *The Works of Thomas Otway: Plays, Poems, and Love-Letters*, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), I, p. 17.

²⁷ David Masson, *Shakespeare Personally* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914), pp. 134-5.

²⁸ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark, rpt. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), Discourse VIII, p. 148.

²⁹ In his commentary on *As You Like It*, Tieck notes that 'Jaques is probably intended to be a comic version of what Hamlet is in the tragedy; the character is finely drawn, only the poet has quite missed the comic, if that was his intention'. See 'Ludwig Tieck on Shakespeare and Jonson', in D.H. Craig, ed., *Ben Jonson: The Critical Heritage 1599-1798* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 577; and T.J.B. Spencer's 'Shakespeare's Careless Art', in Milton Crane, ed., *Shakespeare's Art: Seven Essays* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 116.

³⁰ In the introduction to his 1747 edition of the *Works*, Warburton notes 'the amazing sagacity with which [Shakespeare] investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human action', and 'his happy manner of communicating this knowledge, in the just and lively paintings which he has given us of all our passions, appetites and pursuits'. See Beverley Warner, ed., *Famous Introductions to Shakespeare's Plays: By the Notable Editors of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), p. 105. In 1765, Lord Lyttleton declared that Shakespeare 'painted all characters, from kings down to peasants, with equal truth and equal force'. Lyttleton's

Benjamin West's of the distracted Ophelia, and many others like them, all meant that eighteenth-century Shakespeareans were surrounded by opportunities to become literal witnesses to the dramatist's spectacular art.³¹ However, the passion for 'reading' scenes from Shakespearean drama as painterly artefacts was no exclusively Augustan fixation. It is still apparent, much later, in Jane Donawerth's analysis of the gripped wrists, the wrinkled brows and the rolling eyes of the citizens described by Hubert at the end of *King John*. 'The picture presented is vivid', she remarks, 'recalling the color, structure, and grotesquerie in paintings by Brueghel and Cranach'. In the English countryside cluttered by inhabitants mad with grief at the death of Arthur, 'focused details pile up in a busy, almost frenzied scene of intensity and sorrow'.³²

As is evident from these few examples alone, all manner of writers have eulogised over Shakespeare's speaking paintings — none more so, perhaps, than those working in the Romantic period. The critiques produced at this time acquired a new theoretical bent, as figures such as Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt and Samuel Taylor Coleridge grappled with the problem of expressing the peculiarly affective power of Shakespeare's language. Transporting us back with him to Elizabethan England, Coleridge asks that we 'contrast the stage of the ancients with that of the time of Shakespear, and we shall be struck with his genius; with them it had the trappings of a royal and religious ceremony; with him, it was a naked room, a blanket for a curtain; but with his vivid appeals to the imagination [he] figured it out a "field for monarchs"'.³³

remarks are reprinted in C.E. Hughes's compilation, *The Praise of Shakespeare: An English Anthology* (London: Methuen, 1904), p. 292.

³¹ T.S.R. Boase's 'Illustrations of Shakespeare's Plays in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes* 10 (1947): 83-108, provides a detailed account of the illustrations appearing in various editions of the works, beginning with Rowe's in 1709, and also discusses the pieces commissioned for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, opened in 1789. Boase associates the massive increase in production of Shakespearean painting with the meteoric rise to fame of the actor David Garrick in the early 1740s. See also Ronald Paulson, *Book and Painting: Shakespeare, Milton and the Bible. Literary Texts and the Emergence of English Painting*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982). Barry and West are discussed in chapter 1; chapter 2 is devoted to Hogarth.

³² Jane Donawerth, *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century Study of Language* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 168.

³³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Lectures on the Characteristics of Shakespear', in Jonathan Bate, ed., *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, rpt. (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 129. Coleridge's

This whimsical reflection on the paucity of objects in the Elizabethan playhouse raises an important point. Shakespeare wrote for the theatre, the language of which 'is the sum of its gestures, both verbal, physical and metaphoric; as Owen Feltham noted in 1628, "The Stage feeds both the eare and the eye"'.³⁴ As a dramatist, Shakespeare could hardly fail to give his audience something to look at. Indeed, if any one of his company resembled the 'Excellent Actor' anatomised in the Overburian characters, he was himself 'an exquisite painter'.³⁵ Given the fact that Shakespeare wrote speaking parts for real, visible people, is it not mere irrational bardolatry to commend these vivid images for their ability to 'speak'? Possibly, but by no means entirely, for the idea of Shakespeare as a designer of powerfully articulate *pictures* was also endorsed by

assumptions about the bareness of the Elizabethan stage are reasonable, given Shakespeare's embarrassed reference to the 'four or five most vile and ragged foils' employed to signify Agincourt in *Henry V* (4.0.50). Nevertheless, the previously popular and highly romanticised notion advanced by, for example, William J. Lawrence, in *The Physical Conditions of the Elizabethan Public Playhouse* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927), of a completely empty 'platform jutting out into an open circus, with the sun casting its beam over the groundlings' (1), does need to be modified in accordance with the recent findings of theatre historians. While Bernard Beckerman has estimated that, of all the scenes Shakespeare wrote for the Globe, 80% could have been performed on a bare stage platform, Henslowe's 1598 inventory of his stock — including i. Hell Mought, i. bedsteade, i. payer of stayers, a raynbowe, i. tree of gowlden apelles, miscellaneous altars, and so on — introduces intriguing possibilities. On Beckerman and Henslowe see Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 187-93.

³⁴ Molly Smith, *The Darker World Within: Evil in the Tragedies of Shakespeare and his Successors* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), p. 36.

³⁵ Sir Thomas Overbury, *The Overburian Characters, To Which is Added A Wife*, ed. W.J. Paylor, Percy Reprints 13 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), p. 77. Paylor makes a persuasive case for attributing 'The Excellent Actor' (one of the 32 'Characters' added in the text's 6th impression) to John Webster (xvii-xix). For an eloquent discussion of the parallels between theatre and painting, read in the light of Leonardo's praise of the latter's superior achievements and applied to Shakespeare, see John Dixon Hunt, 'Shakespeare and the *Paragone*: A Reading of *Timon of Athens*', in Werner Habicht, D.J. Palmer and Roger Pringle, eds., *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Shakespeare Association, 1986* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1988). Dixon Hunt argues persuasively that the two arts are intrinsically connected: both theatre and painting being concerned, ultimately, with the communication of inward states via outward gestures. See also Leonard Barkan, 'Making Pictures Speak: Renaissance Art, Elizabethan Literature, Modern Scholarship', *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995): 326-51. Drawing on work by Lucy Gent, who emphasises the remarkably low level of visual 'literacy' in Elizabethan England, Barkan argues that 'the theater is England's lively pictorial culture, the answer, the compensation, the *supplément* in the face of all the painting, sculpture, and art theory that was so famously alive in the Europeans civilizations that Elizabethans dreamed about' (388, italics in original).

those Romantic writers who preferred to engage with him in the study, not from a seat facing a stage.³⁶

Of such persons the nineteenth century yielded no shortage. From their accounts it would seem that a fusty blanket and a tattered curtain, the less conspicuous the better, provided stage decoration enough — any superfluous addition to which would culpably detract from the main business of the work's language. The 'elaborate and anxious provision of scenery, which the luxury of [his] age' demanded was anathema to Charles Lamb, who believed it destroyed altogether the 'illusion which it [was] introduced to aid'.³⁷ Shakespearean drama, according to this critic, contained few subjects capable of being enhanced by theatrical representation. A work like *The Tempest*, in fact, was positively ruined by the addition of 'real' supernatural creatures, prancing and capering about. 'It is one thing to read of an enchanter, and to believe the wondrous tale while we are reading it', grumbled Lamb:

but to have a conjurer brought before us in his conjuring-gown, with his spirits about him, which none but himself and some hundred of favoured spectators before the curtain are supposed to see, involves such a quantity of the *hateful incredible*, that all our reverence for the author cannot hinder us from perceiving such gross attempts on the senses to be in the highest degree childish and inefficient.³⁸

The officious presence of a real Prospero can only impede the process by which the Shakespearean submits to a willing suspension of disbelief. In his contemplation of this playwright's drama, at least, Lamb might well have seconded the argument proposed by Paulo Sarpi, in the *History of the Council of Trent*, that 'a thing conceived does not necessarily exist'.³⁹

³⁶ On the theories behind the Romantic turn from the stage see Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theater: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), Chapter 1 and *passim*.

³⁷ Charles Lamb, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation', in Bate, ed., *Romantics*, p. 126.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, (italics in original).

³⁹ Cited in William J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1550-1640* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 42.

Less irritated than Charles Lamb by the implausible appearance and disappearance of nymphs and reapers, other early Shakespeareans focused on the dramatist's *written* treatment of events existing in the realm of the probable. Reflecting in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* on the perennial problem of staging convincing death scenes, John Dryden explained how the 'words of a good writer, which describe it lively, will make a deeper impression of belief in us than all the actor can persuade us to, when he seems to fall dead before us; as a poet in the description of a beautiful garden, or a meadow, will please our imagination more than the place itself can please our sight'.⁴⁰ Shakespeare, according to Dryden, was one such 'good writer'. 'All the images of Nature were still present to him', remarked the younger poet, 'and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too'.⁴¹

What Dryden praised as a description vivid enough to be felt would have been identified by a rhetorician as an example of *enargeia* or *evidentia*.⁴² And it was this figure that both ancient and early modern theorists believed held the key to persuasion.⁴³ Quintilian, for instance, described *enargeia* as a 'vivid illustration' which 'thrusts itself upon our notice', and went on to extol it as 'the highest of all oratorical gifts'.⁴⁴ More importantly for our immediate purposes, Quintilian's emphasis on the impact of vivid description on listeners was adapted by Erasmus, in the sixteenth century, to cover the written as opposed to the

⁴⁰ John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, in W.P. Ker, ed., *Essays of John Dryden*, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), I, p. 63.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

⁴² These were the terms used most frequently in the early modern period, though others were also current. In *A Treatise of the Figures of Grammer and Rhetorike* (London, 1555), Richard Sherry groups a number of figures, including *prosopopoeia* ('when any man is described'), *ethopoeia* (an 'expressyon of mylde maners and affections'), and *topographia* ('the discription of a place'), under the general heading *Demonstratio*: 'when we so plainly and copiously expresse a thing, a person, & an affection, maners, speach, and circustance [sic], that the reader, semeth to see it before his eies, as though it wer livelye paynted in a table' (<http://collections.chadwyck.co.uk>).

⁴³ Cicero compares the 'ornament' he calls 'brilliance' to others such as 'brevity', and concludes that 'brilliance is worth considerably more than the clearness above mentioned. The one helps us to understand what is said, but the other makes us feel that we actually see it before our eyes'. See *De Partitione Oratoria*, in *De Oratore Bk. III, Fato, Paradoxa Stoicorum, De Partitione Oratoria*, trans. H. Rackham, 2 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1948), II, 6.20-21.

⁴⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1920-21), III, 8.3.61; 71.

spoken word. The fifth method of 'enrichment' or 'amplification' described in *De Copia* is translated as *evidentia* or 'vividness':

We employ this whenever, for the sake of amplifying or decorating our passage ... instead of setting out the subject in bare simplicity, we fill in the colours and set it up like a picture to look at, so that we seem to have painted the scene rather than described it, and the reader seems to have seen rather than read. We shall be able to do this satisfactorily if we first *mentally review the whole nature of the subject and everything connected with it, its very appearance in fact*. Then we should give it substance with appropriate words and figures of speech, to make it as vivid and clear to the reader as possible.⁴⁵

Erasmus's description of the rhetorical figure *evidentia* is notable for the convenient summary it seems to provide of all that Romantic writers like William Hazlitt found best in Shakespeare. As Hazlitt saw it, the playwright's ability to depict 'miraculous truth[s] of nature' did not depend on 'a combination and a form' of words, but proved instead that 'all the persons concerned *must have been present in the poet's imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal*; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader'.⁴⁶ For Hazlitt, it is Shakespeare's capacity to mentally 'rehearse' the 'whole nature of [his] subject' that enables his reader to feel that they 'have seen rather than read'. 'In reading this author', he says:

you do not merely learn what his characters say, — you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decypher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the bye-play, as we might see it on a stage. A word, an epithet paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Erasmus, *De Copia*, in *Literary and Educational Writings* 2, 'De Copia/De Ratione Studii', trans. Betty I. Knott, in Craig R. Thompson, ed., *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 86 volumes (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1974-93), XXIV, p. 577 (italics mine).

⁴⁶ William Hazlitt, 'On Shakspeare and Milton', in Bate, ed., *Romantics*, p. 183 (italics mine).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Quintilian's account of the 'vivid illustration' which 'thrusts itself upon our notice' is mirrored in Hazlitt's scheme by the striking Shakespearean word-painting that 'throws us back'.⁴⁸ According to George Chapman, the power unleashed by '*Energia*, or clearness of representation', depends upon a writer's ability to give to his subject 'lustre, shadow, and heightening', which, in poetry as in painting, add 'motion, spirit, and life'.⁴⁹ 'Each object and circumstance exists in [Shakespeare's] mind, as it would have existed in reality', wrote Hazlitt, as if by way of uncanny confirmation. 'In the world of his imagination, every thing has a life'.⁵⁰

These Romantic reflections on the special nature of Shakespeare's artistry bear a striking resemblance to the accounts given by rhetoricians of the affective power of *evidentia*. In the light of this correspondence, the reasons for Shakespeare's popularity among the Romantics are not far to seek. Lamb's suspicion of the 'gross attempts on the senses' made by theatrical representation reflects the continued effort of Romantic writers to escape the tyranny of the eye. A poet who possessed the 'faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the *mind's* eye' was, for this reason, to be privileged above all others.⁵¹ 'A noble scene! don't I see it with my own eyes?', exclaimed

⁴⁸ The physical aspect of language is briefly explored by John Poulakos and Steve Whitson, who observe that 'To say that piece of rhetoric had impact on its audience is to say that it hit, struck the bodies of its listeners with enough force to make them otherwise (a *striking* phrase is striking not in itself but because it strikes someone)'. See their 'Rhetoric Denuded and Redressed: Figs and Figures', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 378-85, at p. 381.

⁴⁹ George Chapman, *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, in Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed., *The Works of George Chapman: Poems and Minor Translations* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), p. 21, 'The Epistle to Master Matthew Royden'.

⁵⁰ Hazlitt, in Bate, ed., *Romantics*, p. 184. On Shakespeare's perception of the imagination as the source of enargeiac speech see S.K. Heninger, Jr., 'A World of Figures: Enargeiac Speech in Shakespeare', in John W. Mahon and Thomas A. Pendelton, eds., *'Fanned and Winnowed Opinions': Shakespearean Essays Presented to Harold Jenkins* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987). On the influence of Aristotle on the early modern and Romantic connection of the two, see Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 78-84.

⁵¹ Hazlitt, in Bate, ed., *Romantics*, p. 183 (italics mine). On Hazlitt's aversion to theatrical representation see the first section of David Marshall's 'Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *English Literary History* 49 (1982): 543-75. The phrase 'the mind's eye', as S.K. Heninger, Jr. points out, has its provenance in the classical rhetorical tradition. The locus classicus of *mentis oculi*, he suggests, is in Cicero, *De Oratore*, 3.163. See Heninger,

Coleridge, too overcome with wonder, almost, to finish his reading of *Romeo and Juliet*.⁵² Such reactions are typical of this 'observer', but whether revered, as it was by he and Hazlitt, or resisted, as it was by the more delicately constituted Hugh Blair, Shakespeare's virtuoso ability to 'fill in the colours' of his subjects — to set them up 'like a picture to look at' — is always taken as read.

Critics discussing writers other than Shakespeare have also sought assistance from the rhetoric of *ut pictura poesis*, of course, both within the poet's own time and for many years after. 'By the third decade of the seventeenth century in England, the comparison of the painter to the poet had become commonplace'.⁵³ In his 1633 'Elegy upon the Death of the Dean of Paul's, Dr. John Donne', Thomas Carew, for example, paid homage to a poet whose rejection of 'servile imitation / Hast redeemed, and opened us a mine / Of rich and pregnant fancy, drawn a line / Of masculine expression'.⁵⁴ Commenting on the difficulty of untangling individual authorship in the Beaumont and Fletcher collaboration, Jasper Maine wondered

... whether one did contrive, the other write,
Or one framed the plot, the other did indite;
Whether one found the matter, th'other dresse,
Or the one disposed what the other did expresse;
... So evenly drawne out, so gently spun,
That Art with Nature nere did smother run.⁵⁵

Approaching the subject from a slightly different angle, Henry Chettle's *Englandes Mourning Garment* reproaches a number of early seventeenth-century poets for their silence on the occasion of Elizabeth I's decease. Ben Jonson

Sidney and Spenser: The Poet as Maker (Pennsylvania and London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1989), p. 96n.145.

⁵² From *Remains*, in Bate, ed., *Romantics*, p. 518. The 'noble scene' in question is the fifth of Act III.

⁵³ Norman K. Farmer Jr., *Poets and the Visual Arts in Renaissance England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 37.

⁵⁴ M.H. Abrams, gen. ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th edn., 2 volumes (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), I, pp. 1696-98, II, 27 and 37-9.

⁵⁵ Commendatory poems in the First Folio (1647), in Arnold Glover, ed., *The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher*, 10 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), I, p. xxxv.

appears here as 'our English *Horace*, whose steele pen / Can drawe Characters which will never die' — a description in which we find Chettle forced into the paradoxical position of having to stress Jonson's articulate, painterly prowess, in order to condemn, by association, its attendant muteness.⁵⁶ Ben Jonson, indeed, is a popular subject of such reflections. Moving into the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge measured 'our great master' Shakespeare against Jonson, his only 'original' contemporary. Shakespeare is not found wanting, of course, but Coleridge *is* forced to concede that 'there is not one whim or affectation in common life noted ... which may not be found drawn and framed in some corner or other of Ben Jonson's drama'. That such a robust application of local colour is likewise a distinguishing feature of Hogarth's work is mentioned in the same lecture.⁵⁷ A century later, T.S. Eliot remarked on the satirist's 'handling of large bold designs in brilliant colours'.⁵⁸

Examples could be multiplied: comparisons like these are commonplace and might even be considered inevitable. It is actually quite difficult to discuss a poet's representation of his subject matter *without* resorting to a synonym for the word 'portray'. Whether he delineates, depicts, illustrates, figures or sketches, the poet is invariably assumed to have produced a work more visible than audible. One of the rare exceptions to this is the word 'render', whose early use in *Piers Plowman* (an oral poem, of course) derives from *rendren*, to 'say over' or 'recite'.

The apparent ubiquity of this motif notwithstanding, there is at least one respect in which Shakespeare's workmanship has been distinguished from that of his fellow artists. In a volume appropriately entitled *The Singularity of Shakespeare*, Kenneth Muir examines the disparate nature of artefacts fashioned by this playwright and several notable others, including Molière, Racine and

⁵⁶ *Englandes Mourning Garment* (London, 1603), sig. D2v.

⁵⁷ Selections from 'Lectures', in Kathleen Raine, ed., *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Penguin, 1957), pp. 292-3.

⁵⁸ T.S. Eliot, 'Ben Jonson', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, rpt. (London: Methuen, 1976), p. 121.

Ibsen.⁵⁹ Appropriating the by now familiar parallel, Muir himself draws strong lines of demarcation which serve to separate the techniques of these 'great dramatists' from Shakespeare's own. Muir's specific concern is with the regularity of characterisation evident in *Le Tartuffe*, certain of Racine's tragedies and Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. 'It is almost as though the poets had based [their protagonists] on lucid, well considered character sketches, in which every stroke was entirely consistent', he argues. 'There is no ambiguity in Molière's portrayal of Tartuffe'; in Racine 'we find the same refusal to blur the outlines of his characters'. Similarly, although 'Ibsen's portrait of Rebecca West' is both 'detailed' and 'complex', it is still one 'which is not open to diverse interpretations'.⁶⁰

By transferring terms from one art form to another, Muir is able to compare the 'remarkably unambiguous' creations of Molière, Racine and Ibsen to the blurred, kaleidoscopic vitality of Shakespeare's. The analogy is neat, but surely far from remarkable.⁶¹ As we have already seen, Shakespeare has long

⁵⁹ Muir is responding to a lecture given by Una Ellis-Fermor on 'Shakespeare and Ibsen as Dramatic Artists', reproduced in Kenneth Muir, ed., *Shakespeare the Dramatist and Other Papers* (London: Methuen, 1961).

⁶⁰ Kenneth Muir, *The Singularity of Shakespeare and Other Essays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1977), pp. 130-31.

⁶¹ Nor is it necessarily original. See, for example, René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, rpt. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961), on Oskar Walzel's application to drama of H. Wölfflin's distinction between Renaissance and Baroque art. In his *Principles of Art History* (1915), Wölfflin 'constructed a scheme of contraries applicable to any kind of picture, piece of sculpture, or specimen of architecture in the period. Renaissance art, he held, is "linear," while Baroque art is "painterly." "Linear" suggests that the outlines of figures and objects are drawn clearly, while "painterly" means that light and color, which blur the outlines of objects, are themselves the principles of composition. Renaissance painting and sculpture use a "closed" form, a symmetrical, balanced grouping of figures or surfaces, while Baroque prefers an "open" form ... Renaissance works of art are "clear," while Baroque works are relatively "unclear," blurred, indistinct' (131-2). In his attempt to transfer Wölfflin's categories to literature in 1916, Walzel's findings anticipate Muir's in a number of respects. Studying the composition of Shakespearean drama, Walzel concluded that this dramatist belonged to the Baroque, 'since his plays are not built in the symmetrical manner found by Wölfflin in pictures of the Renaissance. The number of minor characters, their unsymmetrical grouping, the varying emphasis on different acts of the play: all these characteristics are supposed to show that Shakespeare's technique is the same as that of Baroque art, while Corneille and Racine ... are assigned to the Renaissance type' (132-3). Comparisons of Shakespeare to Corneille were, in turn, being made as early as the eighteenth century by William Richardson, for example, in *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* (London, 1780). The emphasis here (and in eighteenth-century comparisons in general) is on the difference between 'imitation' and 'description'. Shakespeare is usually identified as a writer who *imitates* the passions, and set against Corneille (a poet of the 'second class', according to Richardson), by whom the passions

been thought to have written plays which are wide open to diverse and even apparently contradictory interpretations. When considered in the light of Joshua Reynolds's remarks, for example, Muir's take on the 'singularity' of Shakespearean ambiguity might not unjustifiably strike us as little more than a dusted down re-presentation of earlier criticism's adulation of Shakespeare, the poet of 'human nature'. Is it not just a spruced-up way of referring to a playwright who opened his career by dismissing 'the heroine of the romances' as a 'shadowy, pale and bloodless abstraction', so as to replace her with a vigorous and plausible 'flesh and blood heroine' by the name of Julia?⁶² Does it not, in fact, simply echo the rather trite 'commonplace that Shakespeare uses every hue except black and white'?⁶³

Not quite. These evocations of Shakespeare's tendency to 'blur' stark outlines, of his reluctance to ply his brush with monochromatic shades, cannot simply be read as yet more grist for the mill which churns out well-worn pronouncements on Shakespeare's unparalleled ability to fill his stage with 'real' people.⁶⁴ Nor are they merely indicative of his recognition that 'even in good characters some unevenness will appear';⁶⁵ that there is 'no sweete, but hath

are described. Corneille is considered capable of 'invent[ing] the most beautiful imagery' (29), but only Shakespeare is said to possess a talent for 'imitation [which] is very different from that of description, and far superior' (41).

⁶² See the introduction to Bertrand Evans's edition of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in Sylvan Barnet, gen. ed., *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 365. Such allusions to Shakespeare's innovative treatment of his female protagonists are popular. In his introductory discussion of *The Merchant of Venice*, rpt. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), John Russell Brown argues similarly that 'Portia simply and easily fulfils the outline drawn ages ago in the Romances, but the picture has come alive; her beauty is matched with a spirit to give it motion' (xlvi). In a lecture delivered in 1877, part of which is reproduced in C.E. Hughes's anthology, George Meredith declared that 'Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters which are saturated with the comic spirit; with more of what we will call blood-life than is to be found anywhere out of Shakespeare' (191, italics mine).

⁶³ Alfred Harbage, *As They Liked It: A Study of Shakespeare's Moral Artistry* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 62.

⁶⁴ The idea of Shakespeare as a kind of nebulous proto-impressionist painter is used in mid-twentieth-century criticism without affectation. Writing in 1959, for example, John Wain admitted that the 'elementary business of getting Shakespeare's concerns into focus is, as yet, by no means complete. This, unfortunately, applies to detail as much as to outline. If the broad lines of Shakespeare's designs are still not clear to so many of those who love him, neither are the concrete details of his procedure'. 'The Mind of Shakespeare', in John Garrett, ed., *More Talking of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1959), p. 166.

⁶⁵ Seneca, *De Ira*, in John W. Basore, ed., *Seneca: Moral Essays*, 3 volumes (London: William Heinemann, 1928), I, 2.31.5.

some sower: The wine is not without his Lees; and the Bee, as it hath Hony, so it hath a sting';⁶⁶ or, as Shakespeare's own Mariana endeavours to convince Isabella, that 'best men are moulded out of faults, / And, for the most, become much more the better / For being a little bad'.⁶⁷ *A little bad; much more the better* — Mariana's relativistic qualifications of character reveal much about the cultural context in which they were spoken first. 'Perfect virtue or perfect vice is not seen in our time, which is altogether humorous and spurting', noted John Hoskins in 1599, acknowledging 'Machiavel' as the wellspring of this characteristically pragmatic *obiter dictum*.⁶⁸

The main problem with assessing the importance of Shakespeare's propensity to 'use every hue except black and white' is that the meaning of this phrase has (in our own time) been largely emptied out. Is there really any place for such statements in an historicised account of Shakespearean drama? The answer to this question is surely 'yes', primarily because Shakespeare's original audience would have attached more significance to his deployment of 'colour' than we do.

When the youthful William Shakespeare — determined, perhaps, to leave school with rather more than a 'small' grasp of Latin — when this Shakespeare turned to the word *color* in his Latin/English thesaurus he would have discovered a bi-fold definition. A *color*, according to Thomas Cooper, is both 'the externall face or beautie of a thyng' and 'a cloke or pretence'.⁶⁹ Use of the second sense of the word 'colour' as a synonym for deceit or duplicity is spread liberally through the literature of the period. Frequently it is linked to the application of cosmetics — the 'borrowed beauty' used (almost invariably) by women to paint out their underlying moral filth. 'If beautie it selfe be thus vaine and brittle', lamented Barnaby Rich, 'what is then this borrowed beautie and first how many

⁶⁶ Daniel Tuvil, *Asylum Veneris, or a Sanctuary for Ladies* (London, 1616), p. 149.

⁶⁷ *Measure for Measure*, ed. J.W. Lever, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997), 5.1.437-9.

⁶⁸ John Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), p. 41.

⁶⁹ Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969). A facsimile of the 1565 edition.

vices are hid under these painted faces, what deformitie covered with vailes & masks, what crooked minds under streightned bodyes, what violating of honour under counterfeit showes of comelines'.⁷⁰

Rich's aversion to painted faces is typical of the attitude expressed by many of his male contemporaries. Characteristically unstraightforward, Shakespeare himself (or, more properly, Shakespeare's sonneteer) refers to the dark lady of his dreams and nightmares as an icon of natural beauty, whose appearance humiliates those who 'put on nature's power' with 'art's false borrowed face'.⁷¹ Hostility to make-up, however, was by no means an exclusively early modern phenomenon. Appearing in the notorious image of the whore of Babylon, presented in the Book of Revelations as arrayed in 'purple and scarlet', it also informs numerous pictorial representations of the Magdalene shown (prior to her conversion) guarding a jar of ointment with jealous and provocative regard.⁷² Certain early church fathers believed that women had been taught to use cosmetics by the fallen angels themselves. That rouge and white lead are not the 'adornment of the Lord' but 'the veil of the Antichrist' was the message preached by Saint Jerome.⁷³

The mere idea of a Satanic peddler of blusher and lipstick is more likely to make us laugh than fear for our souls. Excessive as it seems, however, this deep-rooted detestation of cosmetic adornment continued unabated into the seventeenth century. In a treatise devoted to attacking various early modern vices, *PAINTING AND TINCTURING OF MEN AND WOMEN* is assumed sinful enough to require censorious attention before either *Murther* and *Poysoning*, *Pride* and *Ambition*, or *Adulterie* and *Witchcraft*.⁷⁴ Dealing quickly

⁷⁰ Barnaby Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London, 1613), p. 21.

⁷¹ William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, ed. John Kerrigan, rpt. (London: Penguin, 1995), 127.5-6.

⁷² See Annette Drew-Bear, *Painted Faces on the Renaissance Stage: The Moral Significance of Face-Painting Conventions* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994). The whore of Babylon (51) and the Magdalene (43) are both discussed in this thorough treatment.

⁷³ Jerome is alluded to by Juan Luis Vives in *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*, trans. C. Fantazzi, eds. C. Fantazzi and C. Matheussen, 2 volumes (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), I, p. 81.

⁷⁴ Thomas Tuke's long title is *A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women: Against Murther and Poysoning: Pride and Ambition: Adulterie and Witchcraft. And the Roote of All These, Disobedience to the Ministry of the Word* (London, 1616).

with these apparently more venial slips, the pamphlet concludes with 'The Pictur of a Pictur, or, The Character of a Painted Woman': 'a creature that had need to be *twice defined*; for she is not that she seemes' — an aberration of nature whose 'devotion is fine apparel deere bought, & a fine face lately borrowed, & newly set on'.⁷⁵

When considered in the light of this commonplace collapsing of 'borrowed beauty' into hypocrisy, Cooper's two-part definition seems merely tautological. In the description of a 'colour' as the 'externall face or beautie of a thyng', 'externall', apparently, is the operative word. Wye Saltonstall's suggestion that a widow's apparel is 'much like herself ... and serves but as a painted cloath to cover a rotten wall' fits without strain into the misogynist strand of early modern discourse, in which, more often than not, 'externall beautie' is 'a cloke or pretence'.⁷⁶ The idea of beauty as a 'face', in other words, seems to automatically preclude the possibility of that beauty having spread outwards from within. Indeed, as far as the sixteenth-century humanist Juan Luis Vives was concerned, internal and external beauty were mutually exclusive categories. Seeking to reclaim the women whose use of gold and jewels is designed to 'bedazzle' onlookers' eyes, Vives implores them to imitate the 'humble and frugal' mother of Christ, whose 'outward garb was made of common and cheap material', but whose 'inner vesture is of the most beautiful gold, set and interwoven with precious stones. You cannot be golden in both parts', these glittering women are reminded. 'Which do you wish to be of gold, your body or your soul[?]'⁷⁷

By far the most prominent feature of such attacks on the deceptive properties of colour — whether red, white, or gold — is how heavily they are gendered. Purporting to contain a denunciation of male as well as female reliance on the artificial enhancements colour affords, Thomas Tuke's treatise staggers under the weight of authorities, both ancient and modern, whose ferocity

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 57 and 59 (italics in original).

⁷⁶ Wye Saltonstall, *Picturæ Loquentes, or Pictures Drawne Forth in Characters*, ed. C.H. Wilkinson, Luttrell Society Reprints 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p. 23. Based on the 1631 edition.

is targeted specifically at the forbidden arts practised by the painted woman.⁷⁸ The fact that 'women' can often be discovered lurking in close proximity to other, rather more unusual, evocations of 'colour' points strongly to the existence of a tacitly held agreement on the natural affinity between them. Whether the woman in question resemble Jane Graye, the wily widow reported in a late sixteenth-century legal transcript to have arrived at her hearing accompanied by the husband she was accused of swindling, 'to color her fraude herein',⁷⁹ or whether she be one of the *Witches* believed by James I to use *Phairies* as 'a colour of safetie for them, that ignorant Magistrates may not punish them', members of the female sex are frequently shown to have profited in some way from an immoral exploitation of 'colour'.⁸⁰ But it is not as simple as that, of course. Sir Thomas Overbury's 'Dissembler' also 'dieth his meanes and his meaning into two colours', and indeed, resembles no-one so much as Thomas Tuke's painted lady, in needing a 'double definition, for hee is not that hee appears'.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Vives, *De Institutione*, I, p. 85.

⁷⁸ One of the rare exceptions to this comes in the shape of *Paulus Secundus*, Bishop of Rome, from whom Tuke expects no better, he being a Catholic and therefore affianced to the scarlet 'Whore' (9). In *Quo Vadis? A Just Censure of Travell* (London, 1617), Joseph Hall refers similarly to 'that courtesan of Rome' who 'sets herself out to sale in tempting fashion; here want no colors, no perfumes, no wanton dresses; whereas the poor spouse of Christ can only say of herself, "I am black, but comely"' (15-16).

⁷⁹ Jane Graye's case is briefly referred to by Tim Stretton in *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 123.

⁸⁰ See Book III of James's *Dæmonologie*, in *The Workes* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1971), p. 133. A facsimile of the 1616 edition. Keith Thomas's magisterial *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), provides an account of how various types of misconduct were explained by fairy beliefs in the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, which witnessed a series of episodes in which 'professional tricksters extracted money from their victims under the pretence of investing it with the fairies'. James's own remark corresponds interestingly with the Protestant 'myth', described by Thomas, wherein fairy beliefs were assumed to be a Catholic invention of the Middle Ages, devised specifically by Popish priests 'to cover up their knaveries' (pp. 606-14, at pp. 613 and 610). For an antithetical treatment of the theme, see James Orchard Halliwell's *Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* (London: Printed for the Shakespeare Society, 1845), a collection of documents relating to the history of the superstition as it existed in the age of Elizabeth. Halliwell charmingly laments the demise of the tradition in his own time, presenting fairies as fundamentally benevolent creatures, who enjoyed a 'pleasant prank' and amongst whom there were 'no oaths ... for they detested nothing so much as lies' (xv and x).

⁸¹ Sir Thomas Overbury, *The Overburian Characters*, p. 6.

Additional uses of the word 'colour' in early modern discourse complicate the matter still further. In his *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae*, Thomas Thomas reproduces Cooper's original definition and adds another pair of meanings: 'figures and ornaments' and 'colourable proofes'.⁸² Writers from the Middle Ages on have used the word 'colour' in the first of these senses to refer to the 'ornaments' or figures and tropes of speech.⁸³ When he speaks in *The Franklin's Tale* of the 'colours of rethoryk', Chaucer is exploiting a figure of speech that itself signifies the 'figures of speech'.⁸⁴ Two centuries later, George Puttenham relies on the same word to separate the 'ordinarie use of speech' from that which the 'excellent Poet' has 'gallantly arrayed in all his colours which figure can set upon it'.⁸⁵ Laying the foundations for a discussion 'Of coloures and ornamentes to commend and set forth an Oration', his near contemporary Thomas Wilson praises the 'divers goodlye coloures, and delitefull translations' by which 'oure speache' is made to 'seme as bryghte and precious, as a ryche stone is fayre and orient'.⁸⁶ And in a dedicatory epistle which is itself lavishly adorned with images of radiance and luminosity, Henry Peacham

⁸² *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1972). A facsimile of the 1587 edition.

⁸³ According to James J. Murphy, use of the term 'colour' to refer to a literary device that embellishes — literally 'gives colour' — to ordinary language was a medieval innovation, not seen before the middle of the eleventh century. It was not until 1050, for instance, that Onulf Speyer's treatise on figures appeared under the title of *Colores Rhetorici*. See Murphy's discussion in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 189-90. It is also worth noting, though, that sixteenth-century writers on the subject *did* assume that this particular use of the word 'colour' had its provenance in classical antiquity. In his discussion of amplification in *A Treatise of the Figures of Grammer and Rhetorike* (London, 1555), Richard Sherry observes that 'the figures of sentences, whereby the cōpye, bothe of wordes and matter, is wonderfully increased ... be called of the Rhetoricians by divers names, as some where [*sic*] of Quintilian they be named argumentes, and maners of amplificatio, vertues also of an oration, and lightes, and colours' (<http://collections.chadwyck.co.uk>).

⁸⁴ As Wendy Steiner points out in her preface to *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). James Murphy suggests that Chaucer's use of the term *color rhetorici* in the second half of the fourteenth century indicates that it had by that time become a petrified phrase, meaning figurative language in a general sense. See Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 190.

⁸⁵ *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 132. A facsimile of the 1589 edition.

⁸⁶ Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1982), pp. 354 and 339.

advertises the 'figures and formes of speech' to be treated thereafter as 'stars to give light' and 'orient colours to beautifie reason'.⁸⁷

The 'colourable proofes' to which the lexicographer Thomas Thomas refers last are also part of the armoury belonging to the orator or rhetorician, and this time can be traced back to a much earlier, classical tradition.⁸⁸ Cicero and Quintilian both use the word *color* to describe the 'particular aspect given to a case by the skilful manipulation of the facts — the "gloss" or "varnish" put on them by the accused or the accuser'.⁸⁹ The classical orator's deployment of 'colour' has been displaced in our own time, of course, by the accomplished political rhetor's use of 'spin'. It is a new name for an old term. The continuing impact of 'colours' on the day-to-day running of modern political systems is more than evident in Christopher Brookmyre's satirical, fictional account of the new Scottish parliament at its inception. Here we encounter figures such as Ian Beadie, a hack turned PR guru, renowned for his ability to 'neutralise, or at least dilute' the most damning of circumstances 'with boundless means of dissemblage and distraction'. Radical approaches to damage limitation (or the defence of an 'accused') are worth less in this context than an ability to provide 'changes in tack and important shiftings of perspective'. Indeed, Beadie proves himself able to avert the disaster a dead body would normally occasion 'by putting a positive spin on the whole thing'. 'Guilt and innocence', he remarks, are 'like everything else in this world, entirely about perception'. Survival in this environment depends, as it did in ancient Rome, on the 'skilful manipulation of facts', which,

⁸⁷ Peacham, *Garden*, 'To the Right Honourable Sir John Puckering'.

⁸⁸ For an analysis of Rudolph Agricola's conflation of the two senses of the word 'colour', meaning both rhetorical figures and the 'particular emotional tonality or shading — the point of view which an orator gives his speech', see Wayne A. Rebhorn, "'The Emperour of Mens Minds': The Renaissance Trickster as *Homo Rhetoricus*", in David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, G.W. Pigman, III and Wayne A. Rebhorn, eds., *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Binghamton, New York: 1992), pp. 46-7 and *passim*.

⁸⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1920-21), II, 4.2.88.n.1. See also Murphy's discussion in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* of Seneca the Elder's collection of declamations, originally called *Oratorum et Rhetorum Sententiae*, *Divisiones et Colores*, in which the word *colores* again refers to speakers' attempts to 'create a certain "tone" or "coloring" in their arguments' by interpreting actions in a more or less favourable light (39). A more detailed account of declamation and Seneca the Elder can be found in George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 166-72.

however impossible to deny, are nonetheless always already open to the influence of 'spin'.⁹⁰

Thus reinvented for the new millennium, the term 'colourable proofes' refers simply to a speaker's interpretation of the circumstances and motives involved in whatever matter is being debated. As Quintilian described it, each different interpretation advanced put a new 'complexion' (*colore*) on the facts of a case.⁹¹ Characteristically brusque, Aristotle summed up the situation by explaining that 'since the same thing may have been done from several motives, the accuser must disparage it by taking it in the worse sense, while the defender must take it in the better'.⁹² This is the technique presented by the author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* as the best way of dealing with cases in which the 'facts' of the matter are beyond dispute. If the perpetration of a particular action cannot possibly be denied, it can still be given either a positive or a negative 'colour'. The strategy itself involves a shift in emphasis from straight accusation or defence to the evaluation and interpretation of the 'facts' in question. 'Colours' are about making the best of what you've been given. They are about showing that the moral value attached to an action by one's opponent is capable of being re-read in a different light. With the help of colours (as we saw in Chapter I) an action described as judicious can be re-inscribed as cowardly; an example of 'courage' presented instead as the 'reckless temerity of a gladiator', and so on.⁹³

As Wesley Trimpi has shown, the ability of 'colours' to blur moral boundaries troubled the Greek and Roman writers of antiquity.⁹⁴ This suspicion was inherited by early modern writers — the composer of an 'Epitaph on a Dyer' in *Wits Recreation* claiming 'there no matter was so foule that he could set a

⁹⁰ Christopher Brookmyre, *Boiling a Frog* (London: Warner Books, 2001), pp. 28, 149, 299 and 264.

⁹¹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, I, 3.6.92.

⁹² Aristotle, *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: Heinemann, 1926), 3.15.10-15.

⁹³ [Cicero], *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, rpt. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.3.6.

⁹⁴ See 'The Meaning of Horace's *Ut Pictura Poesis*', *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973): 1-34.

colour on it handsomely'.⁹⁵ In no mood to joke about it, Dudley Fenner described 'Sophistrie' as 'the feined Art of Elenches, or coloured reasons', adding, in no uncertain terms, that a 'colourable reason, or Elenche, is a shewe of reason to deceive withall'.⁹⁶

These 'colourable reasons' are what Francis Bacon called the 'Colours of Good and Evil'; they do not, of course, actually 'prove' anything at all. 'True and solid reasons' are in fact carefully distinguished by Bacon from 'colours, popularities, and circumstances'. Unlike 'true and solid reasons', colours lack the persuasive backing of rational evidence, but are nonetheless 'of such force, as they sway the ordinary judgment either of a weak man, or of a wise man, not fully and considerately attending and pondering the matter'.⁹⁷ Encoded in this passage is a subtle message from Bacon to his more discerning readers. While the weak man may be easily swayed, he implies, the wise man will avoid being convinced by a fallacious application of 'colour', so long as he pays full and continuous attention to the matter at hand.⁹⁸

Bacon makes the perception of truth sound simple. Other commentators, both before him and after, were to view the problem of 'colour' in very different terms. Far from preying only on minds momentarily distracted, colours were often regarded as tools designed to prohibit 'attendance' from the start. Following a closely linked chain of associations back to its genesis in Plato, Jacqueline Lichtenstein shows how the Greek philosopher distinguished the 'pure and colorless colors of black and white' from the confusing impurity of other colours, which 'dazzle the eye and set off a flash, blurring vision rather than

⁹⁵ *Wits Recreation, Selected From the Finest Fancies of Moderne Muses* (London, 1640).

⁹⁶ Dudley Fenner, *The Artes of Logicke and Rethorike* (London, 1584). (<http://collections.chadwyck.co.uk>).

⁹⁷ *Of the Colours of Good and Evil*, in Brian Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 97.

⁹⁸ In his dedicatory epistle to Lord Mountjoye, Bacon suggests that *The Colours of Good and Evil* will best please 'the taste of such wits as are *patient to stay* the digesting and soluting unto themselves of that which is sharp and subtile' (*italics mine*). The epistle can be found in *The Essays of Lord Bacon* (London: W.W. Gibbings, 1891), p. 117.

illuminating it'.⁹⁹ One of the consequences of Plato's foray into the science of optometry is to attach to such 'colours' an indissoluble ethical ambiguity. Rather than inveigling (from MF *aveugler* to delude or make blind) only those unable to see through them, these colours are themselves responsible for the 'dazzle that blinds the gaze' and the 'sparkle that obscures vision'. In the face of the 'flash set off by an overly violent dilation of the visual ray', 'attending' (from ME *atenden* to observe or consider; borrowed from Latin *attendere* to stretch) becomes impossible. To couch this chromatic metaphor more simply: 'colours' disable by means of 'dilation' the attention which needs must be at full 'stretch'.

These dazzling colours are the stock-in-trade of 'the sophist whose "gaudy speeches" and "glistening words" ... seduce the listener with their ambiguity and deceiving sparkle'; of 'the rhetorician who wins his audience's approval through the colors that adorn his argument'; and of 'the painter who seizes the viewer with his enchanting *coloris*'. 'Flattery, cosmetics, artifice, appearance', Lichtenstein argues, 'all the terms of this metaphorical chain linking the critique of painting, of sophistry, and of rhetoric, also qualify the effects of color as effects of seduction; they are also the effects of illusion and pleasure'.¹⁰⁰

Lichtenstein's elegant assimilation of these various senses of the word 'colour' is beautifully cohesive. It even manages, unintentionally, to incorporate all the meanings enfolded in Thomas Thomas's 1587 definition of the term. Caution is advisable, all the same. To allow the sophist and the rhetorician to enter the conceptual space already occupied by the poet and the painter is to risk squeezing any real relationship between them further and further out. At issue is the extent to which the painter's use of red, yellow, and blue pigment, for instance, is in any meaningful way comparable to the sophist's manufacture of 'colourable proofs'. David Bevington is one critic for whom such an alliance seems inevitably doomed. Thus the over-zealous forger of intimate connections between the arts is reminded, rather sternly, that too often the correspondence discovered is inherently unstable: one side of it being 'based on something

⁹⁹ *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 52.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53

physically real and objective to our senses'; the other involving 'a metaphoric leap through which we attempt to describe our affective response to the comparison'.¹⁰¹ Susanne Langer is equally keen to keep poetry, painting, rhetoric, and sophistry apart. The idea that their union should never have been contemplated is implicit in her suggestion that 'there are no happy marriages in art — only successful rape'.¹⁰²

Less sceptical than Langer or Bevington, other critics have been unwilling to start proceedings for such an irreversible divorce. Far from excluding 'rhetorical theory' from the *ut pictura poesis* debate, Alison Thorne imagines it as an intermediary between poetry and painting: the main discursive agent 'through which the visual and verbal arts were welded together and which thereby facilitated the translation of particular effects from one type of language to another'.¹⁰³ Perhaps the best reason for making a leap of the kind Bevington frowns upon is that early modern theorists were apparently only too willing to make it themselves. Consider, for example, Henry Peacham's account of the rhetorical figure *descriptio*:

Descriptio is a generall name of many and sundry kindes of descriptions, and a description is when the Orator by a diligent gathering together of circumstances, and by a fit and naturall application of them, doth expresse and set forth a thing so plainly and lively, that it seemeth rather painted in tables, than declared with words, and the mind of the hearer therby so drawn to an earnest and stedfast contemplation of the thing described, that he rather thinketh he seeth it than heareth it.

Although Peacham expresses no doubt about the ability of 'colours' to move, his evocation of their power to 'draw' a listener to an 'earnest and stedfast contemplation' makes the effects of 'colour' sound far more tame than they appear in the accounts of other writers. That colours were thought to be capable of doing rather more than 'drawing' a listener to contemplate his subject

¹⁰¹ David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 189.

¹⁰² Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 86.

'earnestly' is obvious from the example of Boulton, the pander's servant in Shakespeare's *Pericles*.

Returning to the brothel, having cried the newly-arrived Marina through the market, Boulton is asked by the Bawd how he has fared:

Boulton: I have cried her almost to the number of her hairs; I have drawn her picture with my voice.

Bawd: And I prithee tell me, how dost thou find the inclination of the people, especially the younger sort?

Boulton: Faith, they listen'd to me as they would have hearken'd to their father's testament. There was a Spaniard's mouth water'd and he went to bed with her very description.¹⁰⁴

Far from 'drawing' the drooling Spaniard to an 'earnest contemplation' of Marina, or even 'inclining' him (as the Bawd suggests) toward her, Boulton's colours have directed him to bed as if physically propelled. The worldly reader is invited to realise that this is not because he is tired.

A textbook Englished in 1570, Joannes Sturmius's *Ritch Storehouse or Treasurie* harbours a comparable example of the sixteenth-century tendency to ascribe the same affective power to rhetorical and actual colours alike. Around ten pages into the translation we find Sturmius advising his students on the kinds of writer with whom they should be acquainted. One of the chief functions of this section is to distinguish authors such as Xenophon, whom 'you may read by yourselves', from 'writers that be harde to understand', and who therefore 'must be learned at the handes of ... professours of the tongues and Schoolemaisters'.¹⁰⁵ Included in this advanced league of difficult writers are Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides and Lucan. 'Such among Orators are Demosthenes and Tullie', Sturmius continues:

not for that their sayings be obscure but bicause their Arte is secret and close. And as the eye sight is often glimsed by the beames of the Sunne: so is the sharpnesse of the witte

¹⁰³ *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare*, p. xiv.

¹⁰⁴ *Pericles*, 4.2.91-9.

¹⁰⁵ *A Ritch Storehouse or Treasurie*, trans. T. B[rown] (London, 1570), pp. 9v-10r.

sometime dulled with the brightnesse of the sentence being
amply adourned and beawtifully set forth.¹⁰⁶

Palpably fretful, Sturmius imagines the colourful rhetorical flourishes of Demosthenes and 'Tullie' to be suitable material for youthful consumption only when in the presence of adult supervision. Cicero and Demosthenes become curiously X-rated authorities, more hazardous, even, than Ovid. Speaking of their amply adorned, strikingly beautiful phrases, Sturmius seems to struggle, implicitly, with the tension created by their voluptuous and vibrant sensuality. The seductive nature of rhetorical colour hinted at by this worried pedagogue is made absolutely explicit some hundred years later by John Dryden in *A Parallel of Poetry and Painting*. Watchful chaperones are banished from this more permissive environment, in which the hypothetical poet's deployment of rhetorical 'tropes and figures' is allied to the painter's use of 'colour' in a picture. 'Colouring', as Dryden puts it, is '*lena sororis*'; in plain English, the bawd of her sister, the design or drawing':

she clothes, she dresses her up, she paints her, she makes her
appear more lovely than naturally she is; she procures for the
design, and makes lovers for her: for the design of itself is only
so many naked lines. Thus in poetry, the expression is that
which charms the reader, and beautifies the design, which is
only the outline of the fable.¹⁰⁷

Radiating sex appeal, pleasure incarnate, this painted woman is obviously far from repellent to Dryden. On the contrary, he seems half in love with her already. If Thomas Nashe had lived to witness Dryden's infatuation he would surely have pronounced him beyond hope — a perfect, because pathetic, example of a man fallen under the debilitating influence of rhetorical colour, and specifically, her ability to mesmerise her percipients. In a passage discussing (as Sturmius had) the reading matter appropriate for impressionable minds, Nashe

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 10r.

¹⁰⁷ *A Parallel of Poetry and Painting*, in W.P. Ker, ed., *Essays of John Dryden*, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), I, pp. 147-8.

attempts to eradicate this danger by forbidding outright 'the excessive studies of delight':

wherwith young Students are so besotted that they forsake
sounder Artes to follow smoother eloquence, not unlike to him
that had rather have a newe painted boxe, though there be
nothing but a halter in it, than an old bard hutch with treasure
invaluable.¹⁰⁸

In his depiction of the uninitiated young man, led as if hypnotised to 'followe' the 'newe painted boxe' that is eloquence, Nashe draws on the 'archetypal features of the woman encoded in the legends of Pandora, Eve and Lilith'.¹⁰⁹ The traits belonging to such charming temptresses abound in Henricus Cornelius Agrippa's sketch of 'subtile Eloquence, [who] with exquisite colouringe of woordes, and with a false likelihoode of the truth doth allure the mindes of the simple, and leadeth them into the prison of erreure, seekinge to subverte the sence of the truthe'.¹¹⁰ Incontrovertibly feminine, rhetorical colour exhibits all the characteristics of the woman: both are portrayed 'as disguising behind false appearances, using [their] beauty and finery as a vehicle to dazzle men to their destruction'.¹¹¹ It is no accident, surely, that Milton's Eve is presented as 'adorned and lovely to attract', nor that, having followed her into sin, his wits 'dulled', perhaps, by the 'brightnesse' of her beauty, post-lapsarian Adam inveighs against her (in terms recalling Nashe's 'newe painted boxe') as a 'novelty on earth'.¹¹²

Although prevalent in devotional literature, the use of 'progress' or 'pilgrimage as a metaphor for hermeneutic enquiry' also appears in the many early modern texts which claim to provide a 'plaine' pathway to mastery of their

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie*, in G. Gregory Smith, ed., *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), I, p. 333.

¹⁰⁹ Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Women in Everyday Life*, rpt. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 12.

¹¹⁰ *Of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of the Artes and the Sciences*, trans. James Sanford (London, 1569), p. 19v.

¹¹¹ Tseëlon, *Masque of Femininity*, p. 12.

¹¹² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 10.147-8 and 10.891.

subject.¹¹³ Here, as in Nashe's discussion, 'Eloquence' is blamed for 'alluring' men away from the straight and narrow, and is assumed to do so, very specifically, by causing them to lose sight of their goal. It was precisely this belief in the power of rhetorical colour to dazzle men, and thus to lead them astray, that prompted one of the most notoriously belligerent attacks on figurative language ever composed. The aggressor in question was John Locke; the vent for his animosity, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

In this text, as Catherine Peaden has noted, Locke set up 'anew the old quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy, but with a difference: Rhetoric is explicitly personified as a seductive woman' whose power to mislead men's judgements depends on her ability to move their passions. 'The analogy of the deceitful female to a figurative rhetoric does not stand alone in the *Essay*', Peaden argues, 'but is part of textual system of fearful or disparaging images of women's/rhetoric's deceptive wiles'.¹¹⁴ Locke's awareness of the futility involved in attacking 'those Arts of Deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be Deceived' does not deter him from mounting a one-man campaign against them.¹¹⁵

The account of rhetoric in the *Essay* is not very long, but it oozes a strangely imperious venom. With this in mind, Peaden's description of it as a 'quarrel' seems apposite; on the other hand, one of the most notable features of Locke's critique is the gap between his terminology and the motifs and images traditionally used in discussions of oratory or rhetoric. The prospect of engaging

¹¹³ In *Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Eve Rachele Sanders suggests that this 'pilgrimage' metaphor provides the narrative structure for Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, where 'putting oneself in peril of damnation, swerving from the true path, has a strictly gendered meaning: to stray is to turn womanish, to abandon one's masculine role, to lay by one's armour to recline in the shade' (30-31).

¹¹⁴ Catherine Hobbs Peaden, 'Understanding Differently: Re-reading Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Special Issue: Feminist Rereadings in the History of Rhetoric, 22.1 (1992): 75-89, at pp. 81-2. For an analysis of Derrida's reading of Nietzsche's perception of 'Woman' as the 'very antithesis of philosophical truth ... whose "dissimulating ways" are traps set on purpose to lure the philosopher from his appointed path', see Christopher Norris, 'Post-structuralist Shakespeare: Text and Ideology', in John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 52ff.

¹¹⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 3.10.34.

with Quintilian's oratorical warrior, whose command of figural language allows him to fight 'with weapons that are not only effective but polished and gleaming', would, one feels, have left Locke unfazed in the extreme.¹¹⁶ It is by no means certain, either, that he would have fled terrified from Martianus Capella's *Rhetorica*, to whom we are introduced in Capella's allegorical treatise on the seven liberal arts, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*.¹¹⁷ *Rhetorica*'s resplendent entry is described by Capella in Book V of the *De Nuptiis*:

Helmeted and crowned with royal majesty, she held ready for defense or attack weapons that gleamed with the flash of lightning. Beneath her armor the vesture draped Romanwise about her shoulders glittered with the various light of all *figurae*, all *schemata*; and she was cinctured with precious colors for jewels.¹¹⁸

All woman she is, undoubtedly, but *Rhetorica*'s movement is surely hampered by her pendulous baubles and the weapons that crash and 'clatter' as she moves. In this respect *Rhetorica* bears no small resemblance to Shakespeare's Venus, another supposed *femme fatale*, whose overbearing and sweaty chubbiness make her less seductive than absurd. No; Locke's concern is with the 'Prevailing beauties' of rhetoric; his fear, that men must face a combatant more cunning altogether.

A figure better fitting such criteria might be found in the account of 'Eloquence' given by Valerius Maximus, the classical master of reportage. *Eloquence*, like *Rhetorica*, is still 'armed', but now with 'appropriate elocution and suitable bodily movement'. 'When she has equipped herself with these',

¹¹⁶ *Institutio Oratoria*, ed. Donald A. Russell, 5 volumes (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), IV, 8.3.3. A long list of examples in which oratory is envisaged as combat can be found in Wayne A. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 34-5 and chapter 1, *passim*.

¹¹⁷ Robert Payne suggests that Capella's separation and definition of the seven liberal arts is responsible for the well-known shape of the educational system in the Middle Ages, wherein the seven clearly designated areas of knowledge are then divided into the two groups of preparatory and advanced studies, the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. See *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics*, rpt. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Translated by C.S. Baldwin, in *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (to 1400): Interpreted from Representative Works* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), pp. 93-4.

says Maximus, 'she attacks men in three ways: by herself invading their minds and by handing their ears over to the one and their eyes over to the other to be charmed'.¹¹⁹ Unencumbered by helmet or armour, 'Eloquence' is lithe enough to slip unnoticed into the recesses of men's brains. It is she of whom Locke is afraid.¹²⁰

Although the image of rhetoric as a seductive woman clearly has its provenance in classical antiquity, Locke's own appropriation of the concept may well have been influenced more directly by early modern sources.¹²¹ Drawing on the work of Lisa Jardine, Catherine Peaden claims that Locke adopted the tenets of Baconian rhetoric and dialectic, wherein 'grammar was seen to provide the bricks which dialectic built into its walls, [and] rhetoric was limited to gracing the facade of this edifice of discourse'.¹²² For Locke, following Bacon, 'rhetoric' consisted entirely of *elocutio*; for *elocutio* Locke read 'figurative language', and 'figurative language' he denounced as 'the perfect cheat'. Far from brandishing what Henry Peacham called 'martiall instruments',¹²³ 'Rhetorick' was in Locke's opinion itself a 'powerful instrument of Error and Deceit' — susceptible to suspicion because laid on from the outside to beautify the matter underneath.

The philosopher's perception of figurative language as a kind of 'facing' is made manifest in his infamous claim that 'all the artificial and figurative *application* of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to

¹¹⁹ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, trans. and ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, 2 volumes (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), II, 8.10.

¹²⁰ For a related instance of Locke's belief in the ability of real women to influence the thinking of men without them noticing, see chapter 3 of William Walker's *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 55-67. Walker argues persuasively that Locke's designation of women as 'pernicious and displaced determinants of belief' (56) is evident from Book I of the *Essay*. Here it is the male child's mother and his nurse who are accused of planting irrational superstitions in the child's brain, *before* either his consciousness is developed or his faculty of memory activated. Because women are a formative influence at the earliest stages of the child's experience, he grows up without recognising the impact of female thinking on his own thoughts, and assumes that whatever he has been told by these female carers is true.

¹²¹ For a brief discussion of Renaissance iconography in which Rhetoric or Eloquence is represented as a woman, see John Steadman, *The Hill and the Labyrinth: Discourse and Certitude in Milton and his Near-Contemporaries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

¹²² Peaden, 'Understanding Differently', p. 81.

¹²³ Peacham, *Garden*, sigs. AB3r-v.

insinuate wrong Ideas'.¹²⁴ In this scheme, figurative language is not merely 'artificial'. To the extent that it is also 'applied', rhetorical ornament performs exactly the same act of deception as make-up or paint. Given Locke's apparent indebtedness to Bacon in other places,¹²⁵ it seems likely that this particular insight owes something to the earlier philosopher's distrust of 'persuasions that are wrought by eloquence ... which do paint and disguise the true appearance of things'.¹²⁶ Having been first reviled and then dismissed, 'Rhetorick' herself emerges from the accounts of both Locke and Bacon, triumphantly unabashed, as a close relation of Thomas Tuke's painted lady — a hypocrite 'whose devotion is ... a *fine face* lately borrowed, & newly set on'.

In an effort to heal the wounds inflicted by John Locke's savage attack on rhetoric, certain twentieth-century critics have looked to antiquity to prove that *elocutio* was perceived of neither as 'meaningless ornament' nor as 'separable-decoration-stuck-on'.¹²⁷ While some early modern defenders of figurative language simply denied that its purpose was 'to blinde [its percipient] with untruthes, or deceive him with lyes',¹²⁸ their twentieth-century counterparts

¹²⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 3.10.34 (italics mine).

¹²⁵ The possible influence on Locke of Francis Bacon's approach to the dissemination of unfamiliar philosophical concepts, for example, is an area Catherine Peadar leaves unexplored. Dealing with the 'delivery and teaching of knowledge' in Book II of *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. William Aldis Wright, 5th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), Bacon suggests that 'knowledge which is new, and foreign from opinions received is to be delivered in another form than that that is agreeable and familiar ... For those whose conceits are seated in popular opinions, need only but to prove or dispute; but those whose conceits are beyond popular opinions, have a double labour; the one to make themselves conceived, and the other to prove and demonstrate. So it is of necessity with them to have recourse to similitudes and translations to express themselves' (174). In the preface to the *Essay*, similarly, Locke claims to have 'taken some Pains, to make plain and familiar to [his readers'] Thoughts some Truths, which established Prejudice, or the Abstractness of the Ideas Themselves, might render difficult'; resorting, 'when the Notion is new ... or out of the ordinary Road', to looking at familiar objects 'turned on every side'. In spite of his later condemnation of figurative language, Locke himself illustrates his more complicated concepts with 'similes that function as unacknowledged metaphors of mind'. As Philip Vogt argues in 'Seascape with Fog: Metaphor in Locke's *Essay*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54.1 (1993): 1-18, 'these metaphors all serve a purpose in the *Essay* similar to that performed in the Platonic dialogues by myth, functioning as substitutes for the proofs that metaphilosophy simply cannot provide and offering something familiar and analogous — something persuasive in the absence of proof — instead' (4).

¹²⁶ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in Brian Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 218.

¹²⁷ The phrases occur in Rosemond Tuve's *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 51.

¹²⁸ John Downname, *A Treatise Against Lying* (London, 1636), p. 26.

prefer to confront the charge by challenging the fundamental and crucial assumption that ornament is 'applied'. The success of this strategy depends on the critic's ability to prove that rhetorical ornament is a product of essence; that embellishment cannot be 'false' because it is born out of the matter it enhances. The champion of figurative language must therefore play down its artificiality and emphasise its foundation in nature. A concerted effort to do just this appears in recent work by John Briggs, who supports his case by recourse to the 'prime synonyms for *ornament*, such as *exornation* and *furnishing*':

The prefix of *exornation*, attached to the Latin verb *ornare*, to furnish, gives the ornamental action an outward movement. Likewise, *furnish* draws heavily from the meaning of *fornir*, retained in French: to complete. *Raiment* is of course a shortening of *arrayment*, a setting forth or placing in order.¹²⁹

Adorned by decoration that pushes outwards from within, matter is not 'covered' or disguised by ornament; nor is it 'disordered' or significantly changed. This argument for an almost organic link between style and substance is not without precedent. Cicero's insistence upon their close proximity is apparent in his demand that everything the eloquent poet adds be 'drawn from the nature of the subject, either by metaphor, or epithet, or by other means that are inherent in nature itself'.¹³⁰ The Roman orator's impact on Renaissance theory is also perceptible in Angel Day's early modern writing manual, wherein *Eloquution* is supposed to be 'greatly put forward by nature'; 'annexed unto the stile, which evermore is also tyed to the argument and substaunce of everye Epistle'.¹³¹ Published two years later, Abraham Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetorike* is another sixteenth-century handbook which upholds the sense of a 'natural' relationship between matter and ornament. Although Fraunce describes a 'trope or turning' of a word as that by which it is turned from its 'naturall signification

¹²⁹ John C. Briggs, *Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 93.

¹³⁰ Cited in Briggs, *Francis Bacon*, p. 85.

¹³¹ Angel Day, *The English Secreterie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1967), p. 20. A facsimile of the 1586 edition.

to some other', he also notes that it should be done 'so convenientlie, as that it seem rather willinglie ledd, than driven by force to that other signification'.¹³²

But Fraunce's affable approach to metaphor-making was not shared by at least one of his contemporaries. George Puttenham, the author of the *Arte of English Poesie*, was obviously less worried than either Day or Fraunce were about maintaining a natural link between ornament and matter. There is, in fact, ample evidence in Puttenham's treatment of the subject alone to prove Locke's suspicion of the deceptively superficial nature of rhetorical ornament well-founded. Where Fraunce's advice on figurative language suggests that words be gently led away from their natural signification, Puttenham refers to a 'kinde of wresting of a single word from his owne right signification, to another not so naturall'.¹³³ 'Figurative speech', in Puttenham's view:

is a noveltie of language evidently (and yet not absurdly) estranged from the ordinary habite and manner of our dayly talke and writing and figure it selfe is a lively or good grace set upon wordes, speaches and sentences to some purpose and not in vaine, giving them ornament or efficacie by many maner of alterations.¹³⁴

These words mark Puttenham's significant departure from classical authority. Against Cicero's belief that 'style ornaments a thing of beauty the way blood permeates and colours a living being',¹³⁵ we can place Puttenham's description of figurative language as something 'set upon' (not belonging naturally to) words, speeches and sentences. And Puttenham's erosion of the argument for a 'natural' relationship between ornament and matter does not stop here. He goes on to explain how these 'alterations' work: 'sometime by surplusage, sometime by defect, sometime by disorder, or mutation'.¹³⁶ Such metamorphoses seem as

¹³² Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike*, ed. Ethel Seaton, Luttrell Society Reprints 9 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950), p. 3.

¹³³ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 148. A facsimile of the 1589 edition.

¹³⁴ Puttenham, *Arte*, pp. 132-3.

¹³⁵ Cited in Briggs, *Francis Bacon*, p. 82.

¹³⁶ Puttenham, *Arte*, p. 133.

contrary to 'nature' as can be, and his subsequent descriptions of figures which alter a word's meaning by 'abuse' and 'cross-naming' only heighten this effect.

Obviously different in many ways, perhaps the strongest link between Puttenham and the other writers on rhetoric, both ancient and modern, is their shared belief that the 'addition' made by ornament is in no way superfluous. Figurative speech, wrote Puttenham, is set upon words, speeches and sentences 'to some purpose and not in vaine'. On this point, the *Arte* upholds the twentieth-century argument that refuses to see ornament as a 'meaningless' 'facing', whose only function is to grace the 'edifice of discourse'. And yet there is a sense that, in channelling their energies into proving that Elizabethan rhetoricians conceived of ornament as they do, critics like Briggs are eliding an equally if not more important issue. As Jacqueline Lichtenstein argues, Plato, another authority under the weight of whose condemnation rhetoric has suffered:

knew very well, too well surely, that ornament was never simply ornament, a supplement added to the thing, whose excesses could be avoided by control of its use. He thought of it rather as a principle of perversion that held the germ of dissolution since it wiped out the differences upon which philosophy established the authority of its realm.¹³⁷

For Plato, then, as well as for Locke, the point is not that ornament is gratuitous: on the contrary, as Puttenham realised, it is very necessary indeed. Presumably Plato would not have railed so hard at rhetoric if it was only 'meaningless'; the danger quite clearly resides in its ability to *alter* sense. Had Puttenham's figures of 'cross-naming' and 'abuse' — which effect alterations by 'disorder' and 'mutation' — been available for Plato's comment, there is little doubt he would have used them to illustrate exactly the 'principle of perversion' he feared rhetoric might engender.

Such a principle is in no way evident to Marion Trousedale, who also claims that the vernacular rhetoricians did not believe in it either. 'A metaphor, a

¹³⁷ Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 49.

metonymy, an anaphora are essentially transformations, which the Elizabethans called translations (*translatio*), she argues:

They do not provide the means by which meaning is discovered or altered. Rather, they provide the means by which the 'bare and naked body' is 'attired in rich and gorgeous apparell' so that it 'seemeth to the common usage of th' eye much more comely and bewtifull then the naturall.' What can be said by figures, then, theoretically can be said without figures. They provide in the strictest sense, albeit in small compass, the poetic means of variation, a technical means by which the language of the philosopher can be transformed so as to bring forth a golden world.¹³⁸

What Trousdale sees as the power of ornament to 'bring forth a golden world' anticipates the argument John Briggs makes for it as a kind of 'completion' — an addition which draws out the goodness already contained in that to which it is applied. But if the 'Elizabethans' to whom Trousdale refers include Puttenham and Peacham, her sources themselves destabilise the cornerstone of her hypothesis: namely, that 'translations' do *not* alter meaning. Henry Peacham, for example, classifies *metaphora* and *metanomia*, at least, as ' Tropes of words', or an '**alteration** from the proper and naturall signification, to an other not proper, but yet nye and likely'.¹³⁹ A figure, similarly, is described as 'a fashion of words, Oration, or sentence, made new by Arte, **tourning** from the common manner and custom of wryting and speaking' (sig. B1). If the precise meaning of making a word 'new' by art was in any doubt, moreover, Peacham tells us plainly that 'the difference betweene the Trope and the Scheme, is this, that in the Trope there is a **change of signifcation**, but not in the Scheme' (sig. E1v).

Puttenham, too, is characteristically thorough in his description of 'the figures [including metaphor] which we call sensible because they **alter** and affect

¹³⁸ Marion Trousdale, *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians* (London: Scolar Press, 1982), p. 83.

¹³⁹ Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1971), sig. B1v. A facsimile of the 1577 edition.

the mind by **alteration** of sense'.¹⁴⁰ Thomas Wilson agreed that a 'trope is an **alteration** of a word or sentence from the proper signification to that which is not proper'.¹⁴¹ In addition to this he claims that the turnings effected by figures like *metaphor* — an '**alteration** of a woorde from the proper and naturall meanynge, to that which is not proper, and yet agreeth therunto, by some likeness that appeareth to be in it' — lie at the very heart of persuasion. 'Neither can anye one perswade effectuouslye, and winne men by weight of his Oration', he counsels, 'withoute the helpe of woordes **altered** and translated' (344). *Metaphor* is distinguished by Wilson from *metonymia* and *transmutacion* as a figure that 'helpeth much for variety' (349). This final distinction recalls Trousdale's emphasis on poetic 'variation', and thus provides the only evidence from these 'Elizabethans' that seems remotely capable of corroborating her claim.

The power of ornament, or rhetorical colour, to 'alter' or 'transform' and its place in Shakespearean drama is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

Thus far I have attempted to show how many early modern writers, whether they defend the use of ornament or attack it, also betray an anxiety about the link between the power of *ornamentum* to transform, and the way in which, as a beautiful attire, its peculiar function is to cover something else entirely. Analyses so different as Puttenham's and Locke's do not disagree on the point that ornament covered or 'attired' something that existed before it — what each man thought such covering achieved is where they part company. Consequently, all *ornamenta* were susceptible to being praised or condemned for their ability to persuade listeners or readers, either by attractively adorning matter or by transforming sense. But as work done by Quentin Skinner has revealed, one figure in particular was reckoned to perform both functions simultaneously, and, for this reason, appears time and again alongside the word 'cloak'. The name of this figure is *paradiastole*.

¹⁴⁰ Puttenham, *Arte*, p. 148.

Skinner's reading of certain aspects of Renaissance literature in the light of this rhetorical figure might be described as a sophisticated take on the now much maligned (if not completely discarded) 'appearance and reality' theme in the texts of the period. Professor Skinner claims that *paradiastole* can be held partially responsible for the construction of moral ambiguity in many early modern texts — the plays of Shakespeare among them. Drawing on the two senses of the term 'colour' examined earlier in this chapter: the first being the rhetorical colours of diction; the second, what Francis Bacon described as 'colourable proofs', Skinner argues that the vernacular rhetoricians identified two ways in which a speaker might hope to 'move' his audience:

The more important is said to be the use of the figures and tropes to lend additional colour to our utterances, thereby making them more persuasive and 'colourable'. But the other and contrasting method ... is that of challenging and replacing descriptions instead of attempting to enhance them. The orator's aim in this case is taken to be that of redescribing a given action or situation in such a way as to augment or extenuate its moral significance, thereby hoping to alter the attitude of the audience and enlist them in his case.¹⁴²

As Skinner points out, the vernacular rhetoricians (and Puttenham, in particular) were intrigued by the powerful implications of 'redescription'. More interested than Skinner in the crucial role it played in life at the Elizabethan court, Frank Whigham ventures to call *paradiastole* a 'master trope' that controls the 'ongoing adjustment of public information by redescribing an utterance or action in such a way as to reverse the polarity of its meaning'.¹⁴³ Sherry, Wilson and Peacham all give similar examples (borrowed for the most part from

¹⁴¹ Thomas Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), p. 344.

¹⁴² Quentin Skinner, 'Moral Ambiguity and the Renaissance Art of Eloquence', *Essays in Criticism* 44.4 (1994): 267-92, at p. 273. For an extended discussion of the aspect of *ornatus* related to 'the use of the figures and tropes to lend additional colour to our utterances' see Chapter 5 of Skinner's *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁴³ Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 40.

Quintilian) of the transformations performed by its apt deployment.¹⁴⁴

Puttenham's account of *paradiastole* emphasises the significant part it plays in damage limitation: it enables a speaker to 'make the best of a bad thing, or turne a signification to the more plausible sense'. The force of a charge can thus be moderated by redescription so that 'an unthrift [becomes] a liberall Gentleman: the foolish-hardy, valiant or couragious: the niggard, thriftie: a great riot, or outrage, an youthfull pranke, and such like termes'.¹⁴⁵

The fact that such redescription was plausible, or even possible at all, Skinner argues, attests to the 'continuing influence of Aristotle on the moral as well as the rhetorical thought of the Renaissance':

The clue is said to lie in recognising that many of the virtues and many of the terms we consequently use to describe and appraise human actions, constitute a mean between two extremes of vice. The crucial implication is that many virtues and vices must therefore stand in a relationship of proximity with each other.¹⁴⁶

Skinner's theory about how a speaker may 'always hope to extenuate an evil action by imposing on it the name of an adjoining virtue' is supported among the classical theorists by Quintilian's assertion that 'there is a certain neighbourly quality between a number of the virtues and vices', but it is Cicero's advice that we 'take care lest we find ourselves deceived by those vices which appear to imitate virtues' that provides the basis for his reading of *paradiastole* in Renaissance literature.¹⁴⁷

Cicero's comment is the more important for Skinner's analysis because it includes the word 'imitate'. It is this word in particular that allows Skinner to argue that 'the poets and moralists of the English Renaissance offer a very similar analysis of what makes rhetorical redescription possible. They exhibit a special fondness for images of disguise, stressing how the nearness of good and evil

¹⁴⁴ See Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 148-9.

¹⁴⁵ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 154. A facsimile of the 1589 edition.

¹⁴⁶ 'Moral Ambiguity and the Renaissance Art of Eloquence', *Essays in Criticism* 44.4 (1994): 267-92, at p. 276.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.

makes it all too easy for the vices to mask themselves by hiding under a mantle of goodness' (277).

Although he never makes the comparison explicit, Skinner's paradigm allows us to compare literal images of 'dress' or 'covering' to the 'cloak' or 'face' provided by rhetorical colour. In this model, it is ornament — and the figure of *paradiastole* in particular — that serves to cover something quite different with a 'faire attire'. That *paradiastole* was indeed credited with this ability is made manifest in an early seventeenth-century poem by Anthony Sherley:

Craft weares the hood of Pollicie,
Rashness the sword of Vallour:
Falshood the maske of Honestie,
Lewdnes the face of Pleasure.
... Pride is now cleanlines: the prodigall
Is now the liberall; nice Superstition
Goes for Relligion: Rashnes true Vallour call,
Thus *Vice* weares Vertues clothes; O vile Tradition!¹⁴⁸

Sherley's poem may be emphatic but great literature it is not. Skinner himself selects a more famous example (which scans rather better, too) from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. The key passage occurs at the beginning of Book I, Canto VII, which opens with Spenser lamenting the mendacity of exterior shows; how easily 'with fowle words tempting faire', the fair can be persuaded to abandon virtue and to follow the truly foul. 'What man so wise, what earthly wit so ware', he wonders:

As to descry the crafty cunning traine,
By which deceit doth maske in visour faire,
And cast her colours dyed deepe in graine
To seeme like Truth, whose shape she well can faine,
And fitting gestures to her purpose frame;
The guiltlesse man with guile to entertaine?
Great maistresse of her art was that false Dame,
The false *Duessa*, cloked with *Fidessaes* name.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Sir Anthony Sherley, 'Of Vice', in *Witts New Dyall* (London, 1604), sigs. K2r-v.

¹⁴⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr., rpt. (London: Penguin, 1987), 1.7.1.

Duessa is here shown in possession of all the qualities and trappings most calculated to deceive. She has the 'faire visour', the protean ability to assume a shape that 'seemes like Truth', the 'cloke' (both literal and metaphorical) to hide her 'true' (in the sense of 'real') deceit, and the 'guile' to proficiently carry out the deception. In a context in which Archimago has taught Duessa to 'imitate that Lady trew, / Whose semblance she did carrie under feigned hew', the 'lending of additional colour' serves to obscure what is truly ugly. It is motivated purely (or perhaps impurely) by malevolence, and this, I will argue, is what makes this literary example incontrovertibly *unambiguous*.

To explain further, I would like to return, briefly, to Sherley's poem, 'Of Vice', in which 'craft' masquerades as 'pollicie', and so on. In several instances, Sherley suggests that such sartorial deceptions are a recent phenomenon: 'Pride', he claimed, writing in 1604, 'is *now* cleanlines: the prodigall / Is *now* the liberall'. In fact, his allusion to the strategy as a 'vile Tradition' is closer to the truth: Sherley is describing the duplicitous practices of the figure in medieval and Tudor morality drama known simply as the 'Vice'. In his still unsurpassed study, Bernard Spivack argues that the Vice's method is 'first, last, and always deceit', his chief weapon being 'dissimulation in the form of moral, abetted often by physical disguise'.¹⁵⁰ 'The 'characteristic effort of human nature to miscall by a palatable name the evils to which it is addicted is a constant theme of the moralities themselves', he continues, and goes on to suggest that:

Such deceit is the central characteristic of [the Vice's] role, translating into vivid dramatic image the habitual self-deception or blindness of mankind to the real nature of the temptations to which it succumbs — a subject which receives nowhere a more searching treatment than in the plays of Shakespeare, with their continual emphasis on appearance and reality.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 155.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

Spivack then proceeds to quote the famous passage from *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Bassanio, contemplating the three caskets, regrets that 'There is no vice so simple but assumes / Some mark of virtue on his outward parts' — an example also offered by Quentin Skinner as part of his claim that 'a number of episodes in the literature of this period *presuppose* an understanding of paradiastole and its uses'.¹⁵²

As an example of the rhetorical construction of moral ambiguity, however, this example is surely far from ambiguous. On the contrary, the young man poised before the caskets is not only self-assured, but, in addition to this, is completely confident of his moral footing. When Bassanio speaks of 'Hiding ... grossness with fair ornament', he is referring to the practices of the hypocrite. Like the golden casket which opens to reveal a Death's Head, Spenser's Duessa, Skinner's other example, is eventually 'despoiled', and, 'robd of royall robes', is presented to the 'appall[ed]' spectators as 'A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill favoured, old' (1.8.46). Both examples suggest that:

Wherever there is appearance there is also the removal of appearance, and where there is a mask, the lifting of the mask; and this is not in the sense of some superficial happy ending but rather in the sense of an elucidation, a clarification. People, things and relationships are examined down to their real core, what is unreal and deceptive in them is uncovered, and truth and reality are brought to light'.¹⁵³

This observation from Wolfgang Clemen, made in an essay on 'Appearance and Reality in Shakespeare's Plays', occurs after the ubiquitous allusion to the caskets, though here we are reminded, as is the unlucky Prince of Morocco, that 'Gilded tombs do worms infold'.

To place such faith in the 'elucidation' achieved by the 'lifting of the mask', however, is to join forces with the satirist, who is committed (whether faithfully or otherwise) to disclosing 'the worm beneath the skin' and 'the real

¹⁵² Skinner, 'Moral Ambiguity', p. 279 (italics in original).

¹⁵³ Wolfgang Clemen, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art: Collected Essays* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 173.

body or character which hid behind cosmetics and pretentious clothing'.¹⁵⁴ As Ian Gordon has noted, the satirist tends to describe himself 'in an aggressively militant way. He points, brands, dashes, bares, lashes and strips his enemy'.¹⁵⁵ Duessa is punished for her duplicity by being thus humiliated, but what happens in cases where there are no clothes to strip, no veil to lift, no mask to remove?

Skinner is right to draw attention to the early modern cognisance of the deceptive properties of disguise. At the same time, he takes no account of the uneasy tension in which it existed alongside another (potentially far more alarming) conviction, especially evident in anti-theatrical writings, that, far from being mere 'costume', clothing was constitutive, and, as such, had the ability to transform its wearer. 'Investiture', in the early modern period, as Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have noted, was 'the means by which a person was given a form, a shape, a social function, a depth'.¹⁵⁶ Rather than being the 'supplements to a preconceived self', textiles, armour, and jewels were 'the material forms out of which a hybrid subject was fashioned'.¹⁵⁷ Described by them as 'deep-wearing', this theory is supported by Laura Levine, who claims that a 'fear that costume could actually alter the gender of the male body beneath the costume' was the driving force behind many early modern pamphlet attacks on the theatre.¹⁵⁸

The hypothesis itself has important implications for our discussion of rhetorical colour, and the figure of *paradiastole* in particular. Although in his argument Skinner claims that *paradiastole* 'challeng[es] and replac[es] descriptions instead of attempting to enhance them', his literary examples show exactly that process of enhancement — the use of eloquence to paint out a rotten sepulchre — in operation. To envisage rhetorical colour as a cloak which

¹⁵⁴ Margaret Pelling, 'Appearance and Reality: Barber-Surgeons, the Body and Disease', in A.L. Beier and Roger Finlay, eds., *London 1500-1700: The Making of a Metropolis* (London and New York: Longman, 1986), p. 91.

¹⁵⁵ Ian Gordon, *A Preface to Pope*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p. 113.

¹⁵⁶ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁸ Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 3.

'covers' something quite different, then, is to agree with Marion Trousdale that 'translations' 'provide the means by which the "bare and naked body" is "attired in rich and gorgeous apparell"', when vernacular rhetoricians including Peacham, Puttenham and Wilson, all took pains to stress the ability of such translations to effect 'alteration'.

One of the clearest examples of this occurs in a text produced some time later, and in which ostentatious references to disguise are conspicuous by their absence. In *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, Alexander Pope (himself masquerading as Martinus Scriblerus) tells us 'of the Magnifying and diminishing Figures' that a 'GENUINE Writer of the Profund will take Care never to *magnify* any Object without *clouding* it at the same time':

His Thought will appear in a true *Mist*, and very unlike what it
is in Nature. It must always be remember'd that *Darkness* is
an essential Quality of the *Profound*, or if there chance to be a
Glimmering, it must be as *Milton* expresses it,
*No Light, but rather Darkness visible.*¹⁵⁹

Pope's account of the 'Magnifying and diminishing Figures' seems at first to echo Henry Peacham's individual description of the rhetorical figure *aenigma* — 'a sentence of which for the darknesse, there can be no certaynty gathered'.¹⁶⁰ But it is not long before Pope explicitly relates the power of these figures to 'cloud' or obfuscate meaning to what he says 'are commonly call'd the *Colours* of *Honourable* and *Dishonourable*'. The crucial reference to 'colours' occurs shortly after Pope has solemnly reminded his readers that '*Gain* or *Profit* ... [is] the whole end of our *Writers* and *Speakers*'.¹⁶¹ In order that they might feel this benefit at once, Pope instructs his students on 'the *quickest* Method' of composing the Dedication and the Panegyric. 'Forasmuch as the Duty we owe the Publike', he writes,

¹⁵⁹ Martinus Scriblerus, *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* [by J. Swift, A. Pope and Others], 4 volumes (London, 1727), IV, p. 51.

¹⁶⁰ *The Garden of Eloquence*, sig. D2r. A facsimile of the 1577 edition.

¹⁶¹ Pope, *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, p. 77.

doth often require that we should put some things in a strong
Light and throw a Shade over others, I shall explain the
Method of turning a vicious Man into a Hero.

The first and chief Rule is the *Golden Rule of Transformation*, which consists in converting Vices into their bordering Virtues. A man who is a spendthrift and will not pay a just Debt, may have his Injustice *transform'd* into Liberality; Cowardice may be metamorphos'd into good Nature and good Fellowship, Corruption into Patriotism, and Lewdness into Tenderness and Facility.¹⁶²

The ingenuity of this account lies in the civility of its tone, which, when used by a writer capable of being vehemently 'Juvenalian' — of railing at the 'worm beneath the skin' in good set terms — also gives a sense of the intractable ambiguity of such rhetorical 'transformations'. But the apparent moral certitude which allowed Pope to satirise those who use 'the Duty [they] owe the Publike' as an excuse to 'turn' vicious men into heroes is, I would argue, nowhere apparent in Shakespeare. The 'Truth' which Thomas Heywood claimed enabled men to 'distinguish Fortitude from Rashnesse; Constancie from Perversenesse; Liberality from Profusenesse; [and] Friendship from Flatterie', is no permanent fixture in Shakespearean drama either.¹⁶³ Unlike Spenser, Shakespeare never created characters named Una or Duessa.

Thus, while Judith Dundas may be correct in claiming that by the time he wrote *Timon of Athens*, 'Shakespeare had long been using the word "painted" to signify falsity of behaviour', his actual use of 'colour' is more radically ambiguous.¹⁶⁴ When Shakespeare's characters use or comment upon *paradiastole* they do so not from aside, nor in soliloquy, but in the context of discussion or debate. In addition to this, it is not always clear what the users of *paradiastole* have to 'gain' or 'profit' from so doing. To be 'call'd purgers, not murderers' for killing Caesar 'boldly but not wrathfully' might well help Brutus

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 78-9.

¹⁶³ Thomas Heywood, *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels* (London, 1635), p. 279.

¹⁶⁴ Judith Dundas, *Pencil's Rhetorique: Renaissance Poets and the Art of Painting* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), p. 86.

and his fellow conspirators assume power after Caesar's death.¹⁶⁵ But consider the conversation between Menteth, Cathness, Angus and Lenox in the final Act of *Macbeth*. When Menteth enquires after the movements of their sovereign, Cathness replies:

Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies.
Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him,
Do call it valiant fury: but, for certain,
He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause
Within the belt of rule.¹⁶⁶

It is not apparent here what separates those who believe Macbeth to be 'mad' from those who regard his actions as 'valiant fury', nor what the benefits might be of holding one opinion over the other. Perhaps the most important point, however, is that Cathness, a rebel against this 'tyrant', is not 'certain' which description best fits him either. And whilst the 'belt' within which Macbeth cannot buckle his rule might (at a stretch) qualify as one of the many 'clothing' metaphors in this play, there is certainly no sign of masks or veils in this particular exchange.

And then there is Isabella, who, as Angelo reminds us in Act II of *Measure for Measure*, 'seem'd of late to make the law a tyrant, / And rather prov'd the sliding of [her] brother / A merriment than a vice'.¹⁶⁷ Isabella's attempt to excuse her brother's crime is a perfect example of what Puttenham described as the effort to 'excuse a fault, and to make an offence seem less than it is'. Is Isabella 'miscall[ing] by a palatable name the evil' to which Claudio is addicted? Or is she rather reminding Angelo that 'all things should be taken in the better sence, and favourably construed'? Isabella has nothing to 'gain' or 'profit' from thus 'transforming' Claudio's failings.

¹⁶⁵ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1998), 2.1.179; 2.1.171.

¹⁶⁶ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, rpt. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.2.12-16.

¹⁶⁷ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J.W. Lever, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997), 2.4.114-16.

Chapter III

White Lies and Blackened Characters

Better speake truth rudely, than lye covertly.¹

At the beginning of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles's narrator tells us how the travels abroad of Charles, his young protagonist, 'had regrettably rubbed away some of that patina of profound humourlessness (called by the Victorians earnestness, moral rectitude, probity, and a thousand other misleading names) that one really required of a proper English gentleman of the time'.² I would like to begin this chapter with the example of another 'English Gentleman', though this time a rather more dubious one: Sir John Falstaff.

In the first Act of *I Henry IV* we come upon Falstaff and Prince Hal, the latter of whom is exercising his wit on his friend's predilection for dishonest pastimes. The fat knight responds:

Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty; let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let them say we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon; under whose countenance we steal.³

This 'simile game', as Russ McDonald points out, is 'recreational in two senses':

it amuses the participants, of course, but it also represents their various efforts to make their conversation and their days and nights more vivid, less conventional and humdrum. Such verbal games keep the Prince from thinking about his courtly responsibilities and keep Falstaff from facing the truth about himself, a truth he knows but prefers not to contemplate.⁴

¹ *Wits Recreations, Selected From the Finest Fancies of Moderne Muses* (London, 1640), 'Outlandish Proverb' 767.

² *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, rpt. (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 22.

³ William Shakespeare, *I Henry IV*, in Peter Alexander, ed., *Shakespeare's Histories* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1951), 1.2.22-7.

⁴ *Shakespeare and the Art of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 67-8.

Mrs Elizabeth Griffiths, the upright blue-stocking from whom we heard in Chapter I, would not have agreed more, with the last part of McDonald's account, at least. Herself determined to select, extract and confine, specific instances of 'morality', holding them up to view like so many butterflies pinned on felt, she, however, found rather more to despise in the 'palliating epithets' by which men 'disguise the nature of their vices'.⁵ For her, such 'games' had two 'dangerous consequences'; serving not only to 'blunt the edge of remorse in ourselves', but also to 'induce a milder censure in others, upon the most flagrant enormities':

Thus a profligate fellow, who debauches every women in his power, is stiled *a man of galantry*;⁶ a pennyless adventurer, who carries off a rich heiress, is called *a soldier of fortune*; a duellist, dubbed with the title of *a man of honour*; a sharper, *un chevalier d'industrie*; an atheist, a *free-thinker*; and so forth.⁷

In this short passage Mrs Griffiths lends considerable support to Phyllis Rackin's claim that 'the questions with which we approach the past are the questions that trouble us here and now, and the answers we find (even when couched in the words of old texts) are the products of our own selection and arrangement'.⁸ Outwardly, at least, the assortment of deceivers whom Mrs Griffiths considered so alarming would be more at home in an eighteenth-century novel than they would in a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century play by Shakespeare.

But having passed judgement on Falstaff, Mrs Griffiths uncharacteristically refrains from pressing the immorality of this passage home. The specimen she dropped, however, was taken up and re-examined, some two

⁵ *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971), p. 207.

⁶ Use of this particular 'palliating epithet' was clearly widespread. 'As if to put distance between their behaviour and the adultery that had as recently as the 1650s been a capital offence, English practitioners of the adulterous arts adopted the euphemism 'gallantry' to describe their activities'. See Roderick Phillips, *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 106.

⁷ Griffiths, *Morality*, pp. 207-208.

⁸ Phyllis Rackin, 'Historical Difference/Sexual Difference', in Jean R. Brink, ed., *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England* (Kirkville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Publishers, 1993), p. 37.

hundred years later, by the twentieth-century Shakespearean Anne Barton — not, this time, as an illustrative example of what Mrs Griffiths called ‘deceitful phraseology’, but to demonstrate instead the ‘transforming power of language’.⁹

Where Mrs Griffiths elected to condemn Falstaff’s effort to ‘disguise the nature of [his] vices’, Barton presents him as ‘an example of how to avoid the plain and consequential word “thief”, how to employ language to metamorphose fact’. ‘Falstaff’s one aim’, she argues, ‘is to transform the facts of a world of time and harsh reality into more attractive entities. The distinguishing feature of his wit is its extraordinary ability to make things look like something they are not’.¹⁰

Thus, Falstaff’s management of words is important to Barton, but not because it is immoral or wrong. Her treatment of him depends on a perception of language that is also apparent in Marion Trousdale’s account of the metaphorical ‘transformations’ by which the ‘bare and naked body’ is ‘attired in rich and gorgeous apparell’, so that it ‘seemeth to the common usage of th’ eye much more comely & bewtifull than the natural’. Sir John’s appropriation of the classical motifs best suited to drape his occupation in a gauzy haze of romanticism provides a perfect example of how the ‘language of the philosopher can be transformed so as to bring forth a golden world’. This world is populated by ‘gentlemen of the shade’, ‘minions of the moon’ and ‘Diana’s foresters’. Since no philosophers dwell in Falstaff’s world, no thief can dwell there either. Neither woman denies that Falstaff’s aim is to ‘transform the world of time and harsh reality into more attractive entities’. They are separated only by the different moral value they attach to the talent of a shabby knight to ‘make things look like something they are not’.

We might call the linguistic strategy Falstaff is using here ‘euphemism’. A concept familiar enough to us, the word ‘euphemism’, however, was absent from sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century dictionaries like Elyot’s (1538) and Henry Cockeram’s (1623) until 1656, when it appeared in Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia* with the accompanying definition, ‘a good or favourable

⁹ Anne Barton, ‘Shakespeare and the Limits of Language’, *Shakespeare Survey* 24 (1971): 19–30, at p. 22.

¹⁰ Barton, ‘Shakespeare’, p. 22.

interpretation of a bad word'.¹¹ It turns up again in Elisha Coles's 1676 *English Dictionary* as 'a speaking well of; putting a favourable interpretation on a bad word or thing', but even by the eighteenth century no complete naturalisation of the word 'euphemism' from the Vulgate *euphemismus* appears to have taken place: neither Thomas Sheridan, in his *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780), nor Dr Johnson considered the word important enough to include.

One writer who did was John Smith, who described the rhetorical figure *euphemismus* as one 'whereby in Scripture you shall finde a fair name put on a foul vice, and a word of a good and bad signification interpreted to the better part'.¹² His emphasis on the way in which *euphemismus* puts a 'fair name' on a 'foul vice' might lead one to infer that Smith harboured doubts about the moral integrity of this particular figure. Strangely, though, this is not the case, and in writing of *euphemismus* Smith is able to conform to his practice of citing first 'Scriptural' then 'English' examples of each figure he describes. In the explication of *euphemismus*, indeed, scriptural examples far outnumber English ones; '[t]hus incest and adultery is sometimes exprest by a modest tearm of uncovering the nakednesse: this you have in *Lev.* 18.6.20; 11, 17. *Ezek.* 22.10'. The significant word here is 'modest': *euphemismus*, as Smith explains, 'is also when things (which would offend a modest and chast ear) are vailed with *periphrasis*, or circumlocution'.¹³

Published more than half a century after the handbooks by Puttenham and Peacham, Smith's differs from theirs in its assignment of a separate name to this figure. The Elizabethan rhetoricians settled instead for incorporating the practice of 'vail[ing]' 'things which would offend a modest and chast ear' 'with *periphrasis* or circumlocution' into their discussions of these figures. In *The Garden of Eloquence*, Peacham gives two accounts of *periphrasis*, as befits its status in his text as 'a figure both of construction, and also of amplification', 'when that whiche might be sayd with one word, or at the least with very fewe, is explicated with manye'.

¹¹ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969).

¹² Thomas Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorique Unveil'd* (London, 1657), p. 225.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Not usually a writer much inclined to playfulness, Peacham risks a little self-irony by turning his conclusion into a demonstration of what *periphrasis* is not: '[n]ow because I have exemplified it before among the figures of Gramer, I neede not here rehearse it agayne so largely'.¹⁴ Where he has elaborated upon it, Peacham's explanation of the practice of using many words instead of one is neatly divided in 'three manner of wayes, by explication of the name ... as when for this word philosopher, we say a man of studious wysedome'; 'by annotation, that is when by certayne marks or signes we describe any thing, as ... for the spring time, we say that time, when trees begyn to bud, flowers to blossome, and Birdes to build their neastes'; and, by 'diffinition, as for Rhetoricke, the Arte of speaking well'. Only after explaining these types of *periphrasis* does Peacham move on to its usefulness as a tool for 'vailing' that which 'would offend a modest and chast ear'; 'this fygure', he continues, 'is used sometime for cause of necessity, to shun the playne telling of bashfull matters, and thinges foule to be spoken, as I must goe to the privy, for &c'.¹⁵

Reluctant even to sink to substituting an 'etcetera' for the unveiled means of expressing such foul things as one's desire to 'goe to the privy', Wilson modestly selects the example of 'such a one defiled his body with such an evil woman', to illustrate his 'circumlocution': 'a large description either to set forth a thing more gorgeously or else to hide it if the ears cannot bear the open speaking'.¹⁶

Rather surprisingly, George Puttenham appears to have been slow to take advantage of the valuable opportunities for sparing offence that the figure *periphrasis* offered his courtier-poets. This notwithstanding, his explanation of it — 'when we will not in one or a few words expresse that thing which we desire to have knowen, but do chose rather to do it by many words' — concurs with the definitions given by the other Elizabethan rhetoricians. In addition, Puttenham supplies a metaphor which brings *periphrasis* closer to our contemporary understanding of what is involved in speaking indirectly. A frustrated listener

¹⁴ Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1971), sig. K3r.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, sig. N1v.

¹⁶ Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1982), p. 201.

today is more likely to resent a speaker for 'going round the houses', or for 'beating about the bush' than he is to complain about his heavy-handed use of *periphrasis*. Four hundred years ago, though, Puttenham had already decided that this figure might be termed 'somewhat of the dissembler, by reason of a secret intent not appearing by the words, as when we go about the bush'.¹⁷

Rhetorical strategies that enabled a speaker to skirt around an issue were also employed for purposes other than hiding a thing 'if the ears cannot bear the open speaking'. In *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, Bassanio's recourse to the metaphor of the two lost arrows defends, he hopes, against Antonio taking offence at yet another petition for cash. Here, Bassanio's knowledge that it is to Antonio whom he 'owe[s] the most in duty and in love' prevents him from 'unburthening' his 'plots and purposes' plainly or candidly. But ironically, Antonio's response to Bassanio's fable — 'You know me well, and herein spend but time / To wind about my love with circumstance' — betrays his regret that Bassanio thinks too little of him to speak directly.¹⁸

An approach similar to the one taken by Bassanio is employed to much the same purpose by Claudio in *Much Ado*. Being more financially solvent than Bassanio, Claudio's wooing of his 'lady richly left' does not depend on his convincing Don Pedro to unlock his purse. What each younger man is broaching, however, is his intention to embark on a project which will alter irrevocably the dynamic of his relationship with his listener. Such changes require some explanation.

Thus Bassanio and Claudio both begin by circling warily round their subject; neither electing to attack the matter head on by speaking of their present condition. Bassanio's 'in my school-days, when I had lost one shaft, / I shot his fellow of the self-same flight / The self-same way' (1.1.140-2), is matched in *Much Ado* by Claudio's hop back in time to the point at which Don Pedro 'went onward on this ended action'.¹⁹ Don Pedro's reaction is not, as Antonio's has been, to take offence at his friend's speech. Instead, he warns Claudio that his

¹⁷ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 203.

¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown, rpt. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.1.31 and 1.1.153-4.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. A.R. Humphreys, rpt. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.1.276.

indirection is liable to 'tire the hearer with a book of words' (1.1.287), especially when the 'twist[ing] of so fine a story' (1.291) makes his real subject no less obvious. Clearly half relieved to have been thus discovered, Claudio admits to preparing for a more substantial build-up. Had he not been stopped he 'would have salv'd' the breaking of his news 'with a longer treatise' (1.295), the bashful lover confesses.

Don Pedro's answer must convince Claudio that he disapproves of such indirection. Far from being personally affronted by Claudio's reluctance to speak home, Don Pedro suggests a better way of making excuses. 'What need the bridge much broader than the flood?', he asks, 'the fairest grant is the necessity. Look what will serve is fit: 'tis once, thou lovest, / And I will fit thee with the remedy' (1.1.296-9). In addition to providing him with the 'remedy' for his as yet unrequited love, Don Pedro also offers Claudio an alternative to put in the stead of his 'longer treatise': *dichologia*, or the figure of 'brief excuse'. As if schooling him on how to behave in the future, Don Pedro instructs him in the ways of arguing by *necessum* ('the fairest grant is the necessity'), and warns him against transgressing the boundaries of decorum ('look what will serve is fit').²⁰

In pointing out his friend's propensity to 'tire [his] hearer', Don Pedro simultaneously discourages Claudio's use of *periphrasis* and instructs him in the various ways of 'entry' into a defence of a cause. His comment on Claudio's prolixity equates him with speakers who, according to Thomas Wilson, 'oftentimes begin as much from the matter as it is betwixt Dover and Barwick, whereat some take pity, and many for weariness can scant abide their beginning, it is so long or they speak anything to the purpose'.²¹ Don Pedro's maxims, or

²⁰ My own reading of this exchange thus conflicts with the psychoanalytic one offered by Janice Hays, who suggests that 'Claudio almost seems to be asking Don Pedro to protect him from the intensity of his feelings by seconding the young man's tentative suggestion that he ought to exercise restraint. But instead of advising caution and thus assuming the role that strong fathers customarily fill for their adolescent sons, Don Pedro rather urges Claudio to proceed without delay: "What need the bridge much broader than the flood?"'. See her 'Those "soft and delicate desires": *Much Ado* and the Distrust of Women', in Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Green and Carol Thomas Neely, eds., *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

²¹ Wilson, *Arte*, p. 138. Compare A.D. Nuttall's recollection in *Openings: Narrative Beginnings from the Epic to the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), of Coleridge's observation, 'apropos of Mistress Quickly in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part Two*, that uneducated persons, lacking any firm sense of "point", are obliged to recount an event laboriously from some point of acknowledged origin far removed from the immediate needs of the listener' (214).

sententiae, on speaking only of what is 'fit' and 'necessary' also capture succinctly Wilson's requirement that the orator ensure that his

beginning be not overmuch laboured nor curiously made, but rather apt to the purpose, seeming only on present occasion evermore to take place, and so to be devised as though we speak altogether without any great study, framing rather our tale to good reason than our tongue to vain painting of the matter (138).

In some prefatory remarks to Book II of the *Arte*, Wilson expands on his theories about 'beginnings', noting that 'every matter hath a diverse beginning; neither all controversies or matters of weight should always after one sort be rehearsed, nor like reasons used, nor one kind of moving affections occupied before all men, and in every matter' (133). In order to deal with all eventualities, Wilson begins by describing 'An Entrance: Two Ways Divided'. Recasting the description of the 'Direct Opening' given in the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, he calls the first 'a plain beginning, when the hearer is made apt to give good ear out of hand to that which shall follow'; the second, equivalent to the *Ad Herennium*'s 'Subtle approach', is named 'a privy twining or close creeping-in, to win favour by much circumstance, called insinuation'.²²

Since Don Pedro obviously counts Claudio's intentions towards Hero as matters 'honest, godly, and such as of right ought to be well liked',²³ it follows that he should advise him to use the 'open beginning'. By twist[ing] so fine a story, Don Pedro implies, Claudio risks giving the impression of needing to 'win favour with much circumstance': an approach only necessary 'when the cause is dangerous and cannot easily be heard without displeasure'. A 'privy beginning, or creeping-in, otherwise called insinuation', stresses Wilson, 'must then and not else be used, when the judge is grieved with us and our cause hated by the hearers'. So what might prejudice an audience against a cause in this violent fashion? Wilson lists three reasons: first, if 'either the matter self be dishonest and not meet to be uttered before an audience'; second, 'if the judge himself by a

²² *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1.6.9; Wilson, *Arte*, p. 133.

²³ Wilson, *Arte*, p. 133.

former tale be persuaded to take part against us'; and finally, 'if at that time we are forced to speak when the judge is wearied with hearing of others'.²⁴

By this reckoning Claudio's 'cause', his love for Hero, does not merit approach by insinuation. But *Much Ado* contains another pleader whose case is 'not liked' for at least the first two of these reasons. When Claudio makes public his radically revised opinion of Hero, persuading the majority of the assembled company that she is 'no maiden' (4.1.87), the Friar is faced with defending a cause in which it seems, quite literally, that 'the matter self be dishonest'. Adding fuel to the fire by giving her this title, Don John is also adamant that her 'vile encounters' with the ruffian at her window are 'not meet to be uttered before an audience': 'Fie, fie', he interrupts, as Claudio prepares to give particulars, 'they are not to be nam'd my lord, / Not to be spoke of! / There is not chastity enough in language / Without offence to utter them' (4.1.95-8).

Faced with such a hostile audience, including a father who asks why he seeks 'to cover with excuse / That which appears in proper nakedness' (4.1.174-5), there is no wonder that the Friar hits upon a means of defending Hero which seems to epitomise the 'subtle approach'. If Claudio thinks Hero is dead, he reasons:

Th'idea of her life shall sweetly creep
 Into his study of imagination,
 And every lovely organ of her life
 Shall come apparell'd in more precious habit,
 More moving-delicate and full of life,
 Into the eye and prospect of his soul
 Than when she liv'd indeed.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., p. 136. Wilson's reasons correspond closely to the author of the *Ad Herennium*'s claim that there are 'three occasions on which we cannot use the Direct Opening ... (1) when our cause is discreditable, that is, when the subject itself alienates the hearer from us; (2) when the hearer has apparently been won over by the previous speakers of the opposition; (3) or when the hearer has become wearied by listening to the previous speakers' (1.6.9). In the *De Inventione*, in *De Inventione, De Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica*, trans. H.M. Hubbell, rpt. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), the youthful Cicero suggests similarly that the 'insinuation' is to be used when the case is difficult or 'when the spirit of the audience is hostile'. He likewise claims that such hostility 'arises principally from three causes: if there is something scandalous in the case, or if those who have spoken first seem to have convinced the auditor on some point, or if the chance to speak comes at a time when those who ought to listen have been wearied by listening' (1.17.23).

²⁵ *Much Ado*, 5.1.230.

Not only does the Friar's plan fail, its methods are in complete contrast to the directness privileged by Don Pedro and later by Claudio. In recommending a beginning wherein the idea of Hero will 'creep / Into [Claudio's] study of imagination', the Friar quite literally eschews Wilson's advice that one 'speak altogether without any great study', and, by implication, indulges instead in 'vain painting of the matter'. Not surprisingly, such winding, insinuating approaches did not have the best of reputations. In his dedicatory epistle to Philip Sidney, Stephen Gosson suggests that his own 'homelie brought up' character Phialo 'ought the more too [*sic*] be esteemed, because hee useth no going about the bushe, but treades Dunstable waye in all his travell'.²⁶ 'A snake while she is living winds and turnes every way', asserted Thomas Shelton, 'but being dead is laid out straight and length: so wicked subtile men have many shifts and devises while they live, but when they die, all is discovered and laid open'.²⁷ In *Much Ado*, it is Don John's 'shifts and devises', which, once discovered, allow for the 'rebirth' of Hero. But even were this not the case, the Friar's 'winds and turnes' hardly seem to warrant his relegation to the ranks of the 'wicked subtile men' described in Shelton's simile. After all, *Much Ado* is a comedy, and in the comedies, according to Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'we are obviously not asked for moral outrage at the feigning which is part of the game of *homo ludens*'.²⁸

In what remains of this chapter I would like to question Ewbank's thesis by arguing that, even in the comedies, and in *Much Ado* in particular, certain kinds of 'feigning' might well have been regarded with suspicion by an early modern audience. And I will do this, for reasons which I hope will become clear, by approaching the issue in the light of a text written some time later: William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.

Set during the Napoleonic wars, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* depicts a society riddled with hypocrisy. Few of its members escape the charge of this vice: Becky Sharpe, appropriately, does not, but she is called hypocrite less often than the benevolent, long-suffering Dobbin, and is only painted as black, in this

²⁶ Stephen Gosson, *The Ephemerides of Phialo* (London, 1586), p. 4.

²⁷ Thomas Shelton, *A Century of Similes* (London, 1640), pp. 32-3.

²⁸ Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'Shakespeare's Liars', in E.A.J. Honigmann, ed., *British Academy Shakespeare Lectures 1980-89* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 91.

respect, as her positively angelic friend Amelia. Seeing her father crumble under the shame of his financial ruin, Amelia determines 'with all her might and strength to try and make [him] happy', 'walk[ing] him out sedulously into Kensington Gardens' and listening 'to his stories with untiring smiles and affectionate hypocrisy'.²⁹ Becky, similarly, never lets her husband perceive the opinion she has of him, and consequently, Rawdon continues as what Thackeray describes as a 'very happy ... married man'. 'Who has not seen a woman hide the dulness of a stupid husband or coax the fury of a savage one?', he asks. 'We accept this amiable slavishness, and praise a woman for it; we call this pretty treachery truth. A good housewife is of necessity a humbug'; 'the best of women ... are hypocrites'.³⁰

So what happens if this proposition is combined with Brian Vickers's claim that 'there are few women hypocrites in Elizabethan drama?'³¹ Does it mean that a search through Shakespeare, for example, would yield no woman fit to be called one of 'the best'? Centuries of critics would argue otherwise: in that case, the nature of hypocrisy must have altered during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or alternatively, Vickers is either wrong, or is understanding hypocrisy as a purely negative phenomenon. Given that he identifies 'the liar and the hypocrite [as] enemies of society since they pervert language to their own gain and other people's harm' (90), the latter option seems the more probable.

A further distinction must also be made between Vickers's Elizabethan 'enemies of society' and Thackeray's hypocrites, those 'domestic models, and paragons of female virtue' (211): the distinction, that is, between telling the truth about oneself and telling the truth about others. Where Vickers speaks of 'the pretence of good' which is 'a *cover* for the continuing practice of *one's own faults*', 'adopted to achieve power, riches, or sensual gratification' (90), the pretence Thackeray called hypocrisy meant '**hid[ing]** the dulness' of a stupid husband or father, and resulted in his 'happiness'.

²⁹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. J.I.M. Stewart, rpt. (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 664.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

³¹ Brian Vickers, *Returning to Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 94.

In the first part of this section, I will be drawing on theological and secular texts from the period to explore the Renaissance provenance of, and attitude to, this kind of 'good' hypocrisy. In the second part, I will be situating Shakespeare's *Much Ado* in the context of this debate. To dub the well-intentioned hypocrite the 'enemy of society' is too harsh, perhaps; but certainly, the early modern suspicion of such pleasant perversions of the truth cannot be overestimated.

Where Thackeray's fakes are concerned, the contest between telling or not telling a person the truth about their faults takes place at a domestic or private level. Deviations from the truth like Amelia's are not exactly condoned by Thackeray, as is shown by his deliberate mobilisation of the negative connotations attached to the word hypocrisy. This said, they are problematised by his intimation that the alternative is to sacrifice at the altar of truth the 'happiness' of one's nearest and dearest. Scholarly and historical evidence suggests that early modern subjects were not expected to experience a similar division of loyalties. This was a period, according to Stephen Shapin, in which 'truthfulness continued to be an ideal'.³² Daniel Javitch has also noted how 'difficult [it is] to find any sanction of personal modes of deception'.³³ The veto on 'personal' deception is crucial here. Even writers such as Justus Lipsius, who risked endorsing the political deception that served the state, still gave short shrift to the personal one. 'Many good authors' claim that to 'intise another by a ... false tale' 'be lawfull in a Prince', he argued, but 'it ought not to be amongst private persons'.³⁴

Friendship literature advised taking a similarly hard line with one's closest companions. 'So is he to be esteemed a true and faithful friend', wrote one B.M. in 1596, 'which hath learned to reprove as well as soothe, and to make us sad, as wel as glad, and therefore we ought to have those in suspition, which alwaies are pleasant with us, and sooth us up in al that we say or do'.³⁵

³² Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth Century England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 101.

³³ Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 109-10.

³⁴ Cited in Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness*, p. 109n.2.

³⁵ 'B.M.', *The Triall of True Friendship* (London, 1596), sig. D3.

Opposition to engaging in such private or personal deceptions was more hardened in the Renaissance than in the nineteenth century, apparently.³⁶ Yet a similar tension did exist in the earlier period, and, ironically, is most evident in explicitly moral or religious texts. In this case, the problem is not that complete truth-telling threatens a harmonious home-life, but that it constitutes a fundamental rejection of Christian charity. John Holme, for example, begins his lament on the preposterous state of an entire people unwilling to 'beare one anothers burden' (sig. E2v) in terms that would be echoed soon after in Bussy D'Ambois's assessment of a French court in which 'Reward goes backward, honour on his head':

We have a figure in Rhetoricke, called histeron proteron, and yet no figure now a dayes, because it is the truth it selfe ... The shippe of the worlde by the waves of wickednesse is turned upside down; the heaven that was above is now below, and the earth which was belowe, is now above; wisdom is follie, and follie is wisdom; love, which was a cover for sinne, and as strong as the grave, is now as weake as water, and bewrayeth all sinne.³⁷

As we saw in Chapter I, Paul Baynes's *Briefe Directions unto a Godly Life* also contains a lament on 'how readily occasions are taken in thinking evill of others, how lightly men esteeme of hurting others ... [and] how there is no meekenesse or mildnesse to forbear others'.³⁸ A hundred pages later finds Baynes still worrying away at this same theme. His section on the duties belonging to the 'name' of our neighbour, however, looks set to reconcile some of the contradictions inherent in the Christian's obligation to combine truth-telling with an active demonstration of charity and forbearance. Attainment of the ideal, as Baynes has it, demands that we

rejoice in our neighbours credit, and sorrow for their infirmities ... cover their faultes, through love, of whom we have hope, yet not by flatterie or dissembling, but by Christian admonition and

³⁶ Not until 1679, for example, does 'Irony', a character in Samuel Shaw's *Words Made Visible* (Menston: Scolar Press), suggest that 'dissimulation and deceit are as necessary to the practice of Vertue as to the propagation of Vice' (117-18).

³⁷ John Holme, *The Burthen of the Ministerie* (London, 1592), sig. B2v.

³⁸ Paul Baynes, *Briefe Directions unto a Godly Life* (London, 1618), pp. 78-9.

rebuke, not to bewray a secret, when it may be safely and without displeasing of God be kept in; for every truth, and the whole truth is not alwaies to be uttered, though all kinde of slaundering be abhorred.³⁹

In a passage unusual for its willingness to grapple with the practicalities of this issue, Baynes shows how the good Christian's reluctance to harp on his neighbour's wrongdoing is rather a modification than a contradiction of the command in *Ecclesiastes* that he 'Tell [his] friend his fault lest he be ignorant, and say: I have not done it, or if he have spoken [,] that he do it no more'.⁴⁰ While this scriptural precept seems to jar with the Christian's duty to 'cover' his neighbour's indiscretions, Baynes is evidently conscious that going to the other extreme, and *not* telling him, may smack of 'flatterie and dissembling'. What remains is for the charitable neighbour to dispense 'Christian admonition and rebuke', an enigmatic imperative upon which Baynes elaborates no further.

A different opinion again was given by Abraham Fleming in *A Monomachie of Motives in the Mind of Man*, where 'Due Correction' is set in diametrical opposition to the 'Excusing of Sinne', in what he calls the 'Battell betweene VERTUES and VICES of contrarie qualities'. A translation of the *De Conflictu Vitiorum et Virtutum*, this speaker-less 'dialogue' moves through a series of 'assault[s] given by the sinne', each of which is followed by a 'repulse given by the vertue'. In this respect, Fleming's text is a potential minefield in its open presentation of the persuasive case for vice as well as virtue. Even so, its author is clearly unaware of the existence of a grey area between 'due correction' and its contrary, 'the excusing of sin'. No advocate of a 'sparing correction' left even partially vulnerable to charges of flattery, Fleming praises God for instilling in his prophets 'such measure of thy spirit, that they discharged their duties with all singlenes, truth, and uprightnes, checking and rebuking mightie kings for their transgressions'.⁴¹ There was nothing remotely 'sparing', he implies:

in Samuel **sharplie** reprooving Saule for his rebellion: in
Nathan **severlie** rebuking David for his adulterie: in Aniiian
roughlie reprehending Jeroboam for his idolatrie: in Elijah

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 175-7.

⁴⁰ The precept is cited by Thomas Cogan, in *The Well of Wisedome* (London, 1577), p. 39.

⁴¹ Abraham Fleming, *A Monomachie of Motives in the Mind of Man* (London, 1582), p. 76.

boldlie checking Ahab for his apostasie: in Hanani **stoutlie** twiting Asah for his mistrustfulnes: in Jeremie **controlling** Zedekiah for his disobedience, and so consequentlie in the rest of thy servants both Prophets and Apostles'.⁴²

This prayer for strength with which to emulate the sharp, rough, and bold behaviour of his exemplary prophets proves Fleming unmindful of the hurtful consequences of a truth-teller's refusal to 'spare' a wrong-doer. His reference to the 'vaine motions, which may withdraw us from rating them, that most apparentlie offend thy divine majesty', makes plain exactly where Fleming's allegiances lie.⁴³ The onus for him is on the offence to God that merits the giving of due correction; that one may offend men in the process of so doing is of no account at all.

If the antagonism between these various directives results in a corpus of advice ambiguous enough to confuse any man, contemporary accounts suggest that the early modern woman's relation to truth-telling was even more fraught. As Kate Aughterson has observed, the ideology of a woman's behaviour was in this period defined in relation to the power of the man, and linked explicitly with a well-stocked house.⁴⁴ Her relation to truth-telling was, apparently, no exception. Indeed, this same associative link between a woman's skill in household management and her private interactions with her husband is maintained by Henry Smith in his 1591 *Preparative to Marriage*. 'Though she be a wife, yet sometimes she must observe the servant's lesson ... and hold her peace to keep the peace', he asserted. 'Though a woman ... have many good points yet if she be a shrew her troublesome jarring in the end will make her honest behaviour unpleasant, as her over-pinching at last causeth her good housewifery to be evil spoken of'.⁴⁵

Strange as it seems that Smith should imagine the loquacious shrew as a miser rather than an extravagant spend-thrift, his confused metaphor upholds the link between a woman's discourse and her responsibilities as a housewife. The

⁴² Ibid., p. 76.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁴ See Kate Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 67.

⁴⁵ Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage* (London, 1591), p. 71.

same eye to 'economy' appears in Richard Brathwait's recommendation that bachelors 'Chuse [a wife] that's so discreet knows when to spare, / When to expresse herselfe in bounty, so / As neither niggard-nature may have share in her nor lavishnes'; to choose one who 'know[s] when and where to spare or spend'.⁴⁶

Strong objections were inevitably raised by the writers of conduct literature to the wife who 'publish[ed her husband's] infirmities'.⁴⁷ That she 'must not discover her husband's imperfections and faults to any' was the seventh duty belonging to a wife, according to William Vaughan's list in *The Golden Grove* (1608).⁴⁸ On the question of whether this 'any' included the husband himself, there was rather less agreement. 'If she have occasion to tell him of a fault', hypothesised William Gouge, 'therein she ought to manifest humilitie and reverence, by observing a fit season, and doing it after a gentle manner'.⁴⁹ Directing his *Mirror of Modesty* 'to the weaker sexe, unto whose use it seemes most proper', Martin Day made the following perplexing pronouncement on how a wife should deal with her husband's lapses. 'A Wife is for many good resemblances compared to a Conscience', he begins:

... both prie into our actions, examine, discusse and censure them with a strict and impartiall judgement ... either clearing the suspected, or condemning and lashing the delinquent ... The quiet spirited woman, like the good Angel of the house ... judgeth uprightly, concealeth all infirmities, gently reproveth enormous faults, yet never driveth to despaire, but with a storme of threats mingles hope and comfort.⁵⁰

For the early modern woman in search of guidance on how much truth to tell her husband, Day's suggestions, surely, could hardly have been less helpful. Considering her obligation to be strict in 'condemning and lashing' her husband; to 'conceal' all his infirmities, but also to 'gently reprove his enormous faults', Day's exemplary woman needs must have been verging on the schizophrenic.

Whilst their target audiences and their approaches differ, these accounts are alike in their tendency to focus on whether and how to tell the truth to the

⁴⁶ Richard Brathwait, *The Good Wife: or, A Rare One Amongst Women* (London, 1618), sig. B2v.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Preparative*, p. 70.

⁴⁸ William Vaughan, *The Golden Grove*, in Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Woman*, p. 98.

⁴⁹ *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), p. 284.

⁵⁰ Martin Day, *The Mirror of Modesty* (London, 1629), pp. 54-5.

perpetrator of some specific 'transgression'. What is omitted from their discussion of truth-telling, and what seems conspicuous by its absence from early modern treatments of lying, is evidence of what we might refer to as the 'white lie': the one told, not in an overtly political context, or for personal gain in its strictest sense, but to avoid offending a person or to spare his feelings. An example like this can be found, though not, significantly, in a text about lying, but rather in the 1576 translation of Francesco Patrizi's *Morall Methode of Civill Policye*.

The episode tells of the questionable personal hygiene habits of Hiero of Syracuse; the marginalia invites the reader to dwell upon 'a modest aunswere of a chaste Layde', Hiero's wife. The text expands:

Hiero ... being on a tyme chidden by a certein familier frende of his because his breath did stincke ... sayd [that] hee never knewe so muche in himselfe before that tyme, & blamed his wyfe, in that shee had never admonished hym thereof: to whome his wyfe modestly excusinge herselfe: sayde, husband be not angrie with mee, for I thought all mennes mouthes had smelled so, and therefore I kept silence.⁵¹

Whether calculated or not, the effect of this chaste lady's actions is to avoid offending her husband. Yet even this example does not qualify as a white lie in the sense that, say, Marlow's answer to the 'Intended' in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* does. Hiero's wife is not really lying at all, in fact, since she spares his feelings by 'keeping silence', simultaneously 'holding her peace to keep the peace', and complying with Baynes's recommendation that 'every truth, and the whole truth is not alwaies to be uttered'.⁵²

Like many of the Renaissance attitudes to lying and truth-telling, the authority for Baynes's justification of withholding certain truths derives from St Augustine's *On Lying*. It would be an understatement to describe Augustine's prescriptions on lying as strict; even so, his claim that it is 'never lawful' to tell a lie is subsequently modified by an admission that it is lawful 'to conceal at fitting

⁵¹ Francesco Patrizi, *A Morall Methode of Civill Policye*, trans. R. Robinson (London, 1576), p. 43.

⁵² Baynes, *Briefe Directions*, p. 176.

time whatever seems fit to be concealed'.⁵³ Choosing to deal with uncomfortable truths by holding one's tongue, then, was not forbidden either by Augustine or by his early modern explicators. But while 'secrecy', or even 'dissimulation' (the intentional withholding of truth when truth might be deemed appropriate) was sometimes permitted, simulation (the positive intentional act or utterance that leads others to believe what is not true) was reckoned far more culpable.⁵⁴ Thus it comes as no shock to find Augustine had condemned 'without any hesitation' the kind of lie we might now describe as 'white', fixing especially on

those who by a lie wish to please men, not that they may do wrong or bring reproach upon any man ... but that they may be pleasant in conversation. ... [T]hese lust to please by agreeable talk, and yet would rather please by saying things that were true, but when they do not easily find true things to say that are pleasant to the hearers, they choose rather to tell lies than to hold their tongue.⁵⁵

In his account Augustine details eight types of lies and ranks fifth 'what is done with desire of pleasing by agreeableness in talk' (408), unambiguously placing it, along with 'the capital lie' and the lie that 'hurt[s] some man unjustly', among the lies that must be 'utterly eschewed or rejected' (408). Willing to concede the 'usefulness' of the 'virtuous and merciful lie', which may, perhaps, be serviceable to a sick man's weak health (388), he will not admit that a similar benefit might issue from the lie which spares someone's feelings. Pretending to a person that his 'father or grandfather was a good man, when he was not ... or that he has served with the army in Persia, though he never set foot out of Rome' (403) is the type of lie that does 'much harm' to its teller, Augustine concludes, for it proves that he 'want[s] to please people better than the truth' (403).

Implicit in Augustine's reference to calling a person's 'father or grandfather a good man when he was not' is a motivation not unlike the one that prompts Marlow to lie to the Intended: to tell the lie we might call 'white'. Avoiding, at first, having to speak dishonestly, Marlow tells her the unfaithful

⁵³ *On Lying*, in *Seventeen Short Treatises of S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, trans. Rev. H. Browne (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847), p. 402.

⁵⁴ See Shapin, *Social History*, p. 103.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *On Lying*, pp. 402-3.

Kurtz has 'died as he lived'.⁵⁶ Pushed further, his 'anger subsid[ing] before a feeling of infinite pity', he tells the Intended that her name, not 'the Horror!', was the last word Kurtz ever spoke. The truth he 'could not tell her', Marlow says, 'It would have been too dark — too dark altogether'.⁵⁷ Ironically, though, Augustine's equivalent to this kind of lie, the stimulus for which he claims is to 'be pleasant in conversation', bears almost no resemblance to the first citation of the 'white lie' given in the *OED*. The dictionary offers an excerpt from a mid eighteenth-century edition of a magazine, in which

A certain Lady of the highest Quality ... makes a judicious distinction between a white Lie and a black Lie. A white lie is that which is not intended to injure any Body in his Fortune, Interest, or Reputation but only to gratify a garrulous Disposition and the Itch of amusing people by telling them wonderful stories.

Comparisons are odious. According to the eighteenth-century Lady of Quality, white lies are certainly related to the desire of 'pleasing by agreeableness in talk', but the end product of such a lie: to amuse people by telling them wonderful stories, and its motive: to gratify a garrulous disposition, introduces a new element of humour into the equation that is unprecedented in Augustine. In *On Lying*, in fact, Augustine 'set aside' from the outset 'jokes, which have never been accounted lies, seeing they bear with them in the tone of voice, and in the very mood of the joker a most evident indication that he means no deceit'.⁵⁸ I would, however, suggest that the gulf which seems to separate the definitions given by Augustine and the Lady of Quality is not actually so wide, and that the gap is bridged by a text written in the Renaissance. The link is provided by John Downname's 1636 *Treatise Against the Sinne of Lying*, and occurs specifically in the section on 'the Divers sorts of Lyes'. Coming to the 'merry lye', Downname describes it as one

wherein the lyer propoundeth this end onely, that hee may delight his hearer, and not deceive him, or so farre onely to

⁵⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Hampson, rpt. (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 122.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *On Lying*, p. 383.

deceive, as that thereby he may delight him. For there are some (as Saint Augustine saith) who desire by their lyes to please men, not that they may injure or reproch any, but that they may bee sweete and pleasant in their talke. Now these differ from other lyars in this, that they delight to lye, reioycing in the deceit it selfe; but these delight to please with the urbanity and sweetnesse of their speech, who had rather please by uttering truthes; but when as they cannot finde true things which are acceptable to their hearers, they choose rather to lye, than to hold their peace. Now such lyes are either so cunningly fram'd ... that they deceive the hearer, and afterwards delight him, when he discerneth the jest and findeth his error; or else spun with so course a thread ... that the hearer plainely discovereth them, and is onely delighted with the artificiall absurdities ... of the tale ... So that the hearer is no way deceived by it, knowing that it is spoken in jest to move delight.⁵⁹

In spite of his signalled use of Augustine as an authority here, Downname's explication is actually a corruption of the church father's text. What he does in effect is to conflate Augustine's observation on jokes with his condemnation of 'pleasant speaking', neglecting Augustine's emphasis on sparing offence and making humour its *raison d'être*. Closer in time to the eighteenth-century than to Augustine, Downname's teller of lies which delight their hearer seems, somewhat uncannily, to anticipate the Lady of Quality's teller of wonderful stories. The lie that is pleasant or agreeable insofar as it leaves a person's feelings intact, seems to have vanished altogether.

But as home to at least three major deceptions — one malicious and two benign, Shakespeare's *Much Ado* is certainly a play that engages with our own concept of the white lie. If John Kerrigan's dating of the sonnets is accurate, in fact, it appears that Shakespeare was thinking about this very subject during the period of the play's composition. Sonnet 72, in particular, makes specific reference to the 'virtuous lie' the sonneteer imagines his beloved will be tempted to 'devise' after his death.⁶⁰ The repeated references to the 'shame' this widowed partner should feel 'to love things nothing worth', and the poet's request that his 'name be buried where [his] body is', are echoed in the epitaph which Claudio

⁵⁹ John Downname, *A Treatise Against the Sinne of Lying* (London, 1636), pp. 69-70.

⁶⁰ John Kerrigan, ed., *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, rpt. (London: Penguin, 1995), 72.5. See also A. Kent Hieatt, Charles W. Hieatt and Anne Lake Prescott, 'When Did Shakespeare Write *Sonnets* 1609?', *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991): 69-209.

vows to hang on Hero's tomb — a tomb from which she emerges alive, having died 'but whiles her slander liv'd' (5.4.66).

Thus the paradoxical representation of a love so 'true' that it seems false is paralleled at the level of theme in *Much Ado* by the Friar's concealment of the still living Hero in the monument. The play's other significant 'deception', the gulling of Beatrice and Benedick, also seems to qualify as a 'white lie' in the sense that we understand it: namely, as 'a deception rendered venial or praise worthy by its motives'.

Equally important from a historical perspective is the relative proximity of *Much Ado* to Downname's text, wherein Augustine's deception by pleasant speaking undergoes a transformation into the 'merry lie'. This is not a question of influence, of course, since Downname post-dates Shakespeare's drama by some forty years. Nevertheless, in a play that draws from sources obsessed with the theme of deception, it is perhaps no accident that one of his own additions to these various plots, Beatrice, also ranks among his most self-proclaimed amusers of people.

Affronted by the claim that her wit is culled from 'the "Hundred Merry Tales"' (2.1.120), Beatrice is a woman who herself admits having been 'born to speak all mirth and no matter' (2.1.310-11). In possession of an equally 'merry heart' is, of course, Benedick, who returns to Messina, we are told, 'as pleasant as ever he was' (1.1.34). Yet something always distinguishes the descriptions given of these characters' respective good humour. Though Leonato hopes their guests will not 'mistake' his niece's part in the 'merry war' (1.1.55) between Benedick and her, Beatrice's wit is seldom mentioned without an accompanying reference to its severity. Reflecting while alone upon the 'base, though bitter disposition of Beatrice', Benedick then tells Don Pedro how she 'huddl[ed] jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poinards', he adds, 'and every word stabs' (2.1.227-32). References to Benedick, by contrast, allow that he is 'merry', while what are aimed as insults at the inefficient dulness of his wit actually serve to underline its harmlessness. As Don Pedro reports, Beatrice judges his description of Benedick's 'good wit' 'just', since 'it hurts nobody'

(5.1.161); for Margaret, too, his wit is 'as blunt as the fencer's foils, which hit, but hurt not' (5.2.14). This 'most manly wit' that 'will not hurt a woman' Benedick owns to having and also attributes to his other male friends. Ironically, even as he prepares to take revenge upon Claudio for speaking the words he thinks have killed Hero, Benedick claims he 'break[s] jests as braggarts do their blades, which God be thanked hurt not' (5.1.184-5).

Physically, Claudio's words have not harmed Hero, who 'died but whiles her slander liv'd'. Before finding this out, though, Claudio has set about refuting Antonio's assessment of him and Don Pedro as 'Scrambling, outfacing, fashion-mongering boys, / That lie, and cog, and flout, deprave, and slander' (5.1.94-5). However glaring are Claudio's faults, Shakespeare seems anxious to acquit this boy of the sin of lying. 'Impose me to what penance your invention / Can lay upon my sin', he tells Hero's father, 'yet sinn'd I not / But in mistaking' (5.1.267-9). In giving Claudio these lines, Shakespeare was making an unequivocal statement about his honesty. In their actual *definitions* of lying, early modern writers on the subject varied little: lying involved speaking contrary to what one *believed* to be true. Whether it was actually true was irrelevant. 'There is great difference betweene lying, and telling or speaking a lye or untruth', wrote Downname,

for in a lye the tongue disagreeeth from the minde, and falsely speaketh contrary to that which the mind thinketh ... [W]hen a man speaketh that which is a lye or untruth being perswaded that it is true, hee lyeth not, because his minde and tongue agreeth together, and he thinketh what he speaketh, but he onely erreth and would not willingly deceive, but that himselfe is first deceived; so that such a one cannot be said to be a lyer, seeing he mindeth, affecteth and loveth Truth, but is onely mistaken in what hee saith through ignorance, rashnesse or incogitancie.⁶¹

As the 'mistaking' Claudio is explicitly cleared of this sin so implicitly is Benedick, who, Don Pedro claims, 'hath a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue is the clapper; for what his heart thinks his tongue speaks' (3.2.11-13). In contrast to the many references to the veracity and docility of male speech are set the injurious words of Beatrice. This does not automatically make Beatrice a liar

⁶¹ Downname, *Treatise Against Lying*, p. 19.

or a hypocrite either. What is interesting is her position in a play where both plot and sub-plot depend for their resolution on well-intentioned lies, written in a period, moreover, in which a more general anxiety about the mendacity latent in pleasant speaking manifested itself, in at least one writer, as a mistrust of humour.

Viewing *Much Ado* in this light destabilises its more usual reading, wherein Beatrice is applauded for her wit and Claudio tends to rank alongside *All's Well's* Bertram as one of Shakespeare's more odious romantic heroes. Further, in a context in which Beatrice herself is the victim of Hero's promise to 'truly devise some honest slander' (3.1.84), the actions and speech of these women each serve to cast a shadow of suspicion over the other. Yet while Hero's oxymoronic 'false sweet bait' looks forward to the 'pretty treachery' practised by Thackeray's benign hypocrites, Beatrice's position remains ambiguous. For her character seems to prefigure that of the eighteenth-century lady's teller of wonderful stories, whose garrulous disposition is gratified by amusing people. But Beatrice does not fulfil that lady's most important condition. To be counted innocuous these words must not injure, and Beatrice's, we are constantly reminded, are not nearly so benign.

It would be facetious to claim that Beatrice deserves a place in Brian Vickers's gallery of hypocrites, alongside Richard III and Iago. Unlike them, she does not adopt a pretence of good as a cover for the continuing practice of her own faults, in order to achieve power, riches, or sensual gratification. At the same time, it is implied that the faults she has been prone to are rather continued than abandoned. Her compulsion to 'spell [every good man] backward' (3.1.61) is still in evidence at the play's close, in Benedick's reference to her 'wit so forcible', that it frights 'the word out of his right sense' (5.2.52-3). For many audiences, Beatrice's wit, powerful enough, claims Hero, to 'press [her] to death', is what makes her one of the best of Shakespeare's women. Lingering in these and Benedick's words, however, is the suggestion that this 'pleasant-spirited lady', as Don Pedro calls her, is also capable of perverting *language* to other people's harm. Which of these appraisals is the more accurate, the play leaves radically uncertain.

Chapter IV

The Ethics of Negligence

Affection should not be too sharp-Eyed, and
Love is not to be made by magnifying Glasses.¹

In an article printed in *The Guardian* in May of 1999, Alexander Chancellor expressed an opinion which would not by most standards be considered terribly controversial. Set out in a boldly prominent typeface, it heralds his conviction that 'we should all be allowed to pull the wool over our own eyes; this is a basic human right'.² Lying to oneself is much better than lying to others, this writer implies, and indeed, there seems little harm in the kind of self-deception to which he refers. Chancellor is a journalist whose subject is the vanity that stops people revealing their true age, not a spokesperson for Amnesty International, and whilst claiming for himself this 'basic human right', the columnist's tongue stays firmly in his cheek. But what is striking is how reasonable he sounds. Pausing over his leisurely Saturday morning cup of coffee, the average reader is likely to agree with Chancellor that deceiving oneself is an individual's prerogative, whereas for early seventeenth-century writer Daniel Dyke, indulging in 'that which we may call *selfe-deceit*' had 'farre more deepe and dangerous' consequences than deceiving others.³

Yet we need not look back four hundred years, or even at a strident religious treatise, to encounter beliefs much removed from those held by Chancellor. In 1927 T.S. Eliot noticed Othello's talent for pulling the wool over his own eyes and called it *bovarysme* — or 'the human will to see things as they are not'.⁴ Not content merely to comment in passing on this human foible, F.R. Leavis launched a full-scale attack on such self-inflicted sightlessness. His

¹ Sir Thomas Browne, *Christian Morals*, in Sir Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *Sir Thomas Browne: Selected Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 219.

² 'Senior Disservice', *The Guardian*, 15th May 1999, p. 7.

³ Daniel Dyke, *The Mystery of Selfe-Deceiving*, 7th edn. (London, 1622), p. 38.

⁴ T.S. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p. 131.

characteristically aggressive contribution to the debate appeared in the form of 'Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero', an example of literary criticism at its most personally critical. The humanist most routinely sacrificed at the altar of 1980s materialist criticism, Leavis also seems to provide a blueprint for 'the subject of liberal humanism' constructed by Catherine Belsey. His determination to expose Othello's 'ignorance of self' (and to criticise the 'self-idealisation' facilitated by this 'blindness') is what makes Leavis the quintessential liberal humanist, for whom 'self knowledge' is 'knowledge in its highest form'.⁵

In this particular essay, Leavis's censure is not reserved for the products of Shakespeare's imagination either. A.C. Bradley is also hauled before his jury of readers, once identified by Lionel Trilling (significantly, in this context) as 'a gifted and *conscious* ... new social class'.⁶ Before them, the author of *Shakespearean Tragedy* stands accused of several crimes, and is found in possession of a 'resolute fidelity' to the wearing of 'blinkers': eye-wear singularly appropriate for a man who 'prefers not to recognise' that Othello's 'plunge into jealousy poses us an insoluble problem'.⁷ For Leavis, Bradley is an accomplice more culpable than Othello himself in the Moor's project of 'self-deception'. Ten times Leavis reminds us how 'plain' this is to 'anyone who can read'; 'but we must not suppose', he adds, acerbically, 'that Bradley sees what is in front of him'.⁸

Leavis did not devote thirty years of his life to a literary journal called *Scrutiny* for nothing. 'An audacious polemicist and a judge', determined to 'train a generation in the disciplines of critical thinking',⁹ he was in many ways less tolerant of 'self-deception' than early modern puritan polemicists such as Dyke. Though this earlier writer regarded self-deceiving as a sin against God, even he realised how the 'intricate ... turnings of the dark Labyrinths of mans heart' mean

⁵ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 55.

⁶ Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966), p.172 (italics mine).

⁷ F.R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), pp. 140 and 159.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 149 and 137.

⁹ Robert Boyers, *F.R. Leavis: Judgment and the Discipline of Thought* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1978), p. 2. See also Anne Samson, *F.R. Leavis* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), Chapter 1, 'Leavis and the Growth of English Studies'.

that 'nothing is more easie than for a man to deceive himselfe'.¹⁰ In his *Christian Morals*, Thomas Browne argued similarly that 'the greatest imperfection is in our inward sight ... and while we are so sharp sighted as to look through others' we may still 'be invisible unto ourselves; for the inward eyes are more fallacious than the outward'.¹¹ Accounts like these suggest that the optimism necessary for liberal humanism's faith in a 'confederacy of knowledge' which 'affirms that experience is shared' belongs to the mid-twentieth century, and not to the early modern writer convinced, as Dyke was, that 'the heart by reason of the great wickednesse thereof, is a bottome-lesse and unsearchable gulfe of guile, in so much as none can know, not onely anothers, but not his own heart'.¹²

Dyke's epistemological pessimism is sustained throughout the not inconsiderable length of his text. Stretching to well over four hundred pages, the sheer bulk of *The Mystery of Self-Deceiving* provides depressing evidence of the many and varied means by which a heart might deceive its owner. So what precautions may the good Christian take to ward off this danger? The answer seems to lie in his constant vigilance; he must always be on his guard against remissness, and regard slacking or laxity in any matter as the foundation of his ruin. 'Small leakes in ships, and small breaches in walls, being neglected, leese both ships and Cities', Dyke warns, commenting here on the wiliness of man's heart which tricks him by pretending 'that there are some sinnes which are but *little ones*'. What terrible fallacy is this, he wonders, when 'as in the body little pricks of a pin neglected, have bred wranklings in the flesh, and thence worse matters have followed ... so here in the soule, our ... over-favoriable indulgences to our smaller sinnes, cannot but invite and call, yea ... forcibly draw unto us further and farre more dangerous mischiefes'.¹³

The significance and the veracity of Dyke's prediction would not have

¹⁰ Dyke, *Mystery*, sig. A3.

¹¹ Browne is cited in Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 84.

¹² Belsey, *Subject of Tragedy*, p. 86; Dyke, *Mystery*, p. 2. See also Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185 and 199.

been lost on Robert Greene. Anxious to prove that female whores are more 'prejudiciall to the Commonwealth' than male thieves, Greene's 'shee' conny-catcher introduces an English Courtizan whose 'confession' includes details of how her own little sins bred great ones. The reformed wanton recalls how she 'waxed in [her] hell of voluptuousnes, daily worse & worse. I grew so grafted in sin', she says, that:

... Custome of Sin, tooke away the feeling of the sin, for I so accustomedly use[d] my selfe to all kinde of vice, that I accounted swearing no sinne, whordome, why I smile at that, and could prophanely saie, that it was a sin which God laught at, gluttony I held good fellowship, & wrath honor and resolution.¹⁴

That the Courtizan's 'over-favoriable indulgence to [her] smaller sinnes' obliges her to use *paradiastole* to excuse her enormities needs no pointing out. In this instance, I am more interested in the cameo role played by the Courtizan's parents — a devoted pair whom she admits 'were so blinded with my excellent quallities, that they had no insight into my ensuing follies' (44). The moral ambiguity generated by such benevolent neglect, what we might call 'turning a blind eye', and the ability of such strategies to spawn what Daniel Dyke described as 'further and farre more dangerous mischiefes', is the subject of this chapter.

Dyke's text was published posthumously by his brother Jeremiah, who added a dedicatory epistle to Lady Lucy, the Countess of Bedford. Although Jeremiah's contribution to Daniel's work ended here, he uses this preface to echo, or rather anticipate, his brother's rhetoric, setting the tone of *The Mystery* by confirming how 'justly [he] might have deserved the ignominious ceremony of spittle in [his] face', had he displayed 'negligence or refusall' in the matter of dispatching this work abroad.¹⁵ Capitalising on the resemblance of his own state

¹⁴ Robert Greene, *A Disputation Betweene a Hee Conny-Catcher and a Shee Conny-Catcher*, in G.B. Harrison, ed., *The Third & Last Part of Conny Catching and A Disputation Betweene a Hee Conny-Catcher and a Shee Conny-Catcher* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1923), p. 73.

¹⁵ Dyke, *Mystery*, sig. A2v.

to that of Lady Lucy, Jeremiah refuses to 'passe over in silence' the 'holy and religious course' of Lucy's brother, also recently deceased. Although his marginalia acknowledges no debt, Dyke is drawing upon the same injunction in Psalms as was set out by Nicholas Byfield in *The Principles or the Patterne of Wholesome Words* — namely, to 'Observe Gods workes, keep a Catalogue of experiments'.¹⁶ As if in accordance with this, Dyke reminds the Countess that the late Duke sought always 'to keep a catalogue or diary of his sinnes against God: and every night, or the next morning, to review the faults of the day past: Every Saboth morning, or night before, to review the faults of the whole week: and at the end of every moneth to survey the whole moneths transgression'.¹⁷

Dwelling as he does on the processes and benefits of a ritualised program of self-examination, Dyke follows a path well trodden by other early modern doctrinal writers.¹⁸ The importance of 'ritual' (and by implication, discipline) is evident in texts such as Johann Gerhard's *A Christian Mans Weekes Worke*, which contained fifty-two meditations 'divided into seaven days exercise'.¹⁹ 'In order to enjoy any hope of salvation', as Stuart Sherman points out, the believer needed to 'exercise a constant vigilance over thought and action, a ceaseless monitoring of the relation between self and God'.²⁰

This is to put it mildly. Early modern devotional literature is positively steeped in this rhetoric of the oracular. The follower of Paul Baynes's *Briefe Directions unto a Godly Life*, for example, was advised to 'carefully retaine a viewing of his sinnes by right examination'.²¹ Times of 'tryall' demanded even

¹⁶ Nicholas Byfield, *The Principles or the Patterne of Wholesome Words*, 2nd edn. (London, 1622), p. 62.

¹⁷ Dyke, *Mystery*, sig. A5r.

¹⁸ On the idea that inwardness and self-scrutiny had their provenance in the Augustinian tradition, and that these practises were appropriated, not invented, by humanists, see David Aers, *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ *A Christian Mans Weekes Worke. Or the Daily Watch of the Soul*, trans. Rich[ard] Bruch (London, 1611).

²⁰ Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 49.

²¹ Paul Baynes, *Briefe Directions unto a Godly Life* (London, 1616), p. 42.

greater displays of diligence, according to Thomas Riley, who recommended taking a 'double survey' of one's 'imperfections', 'set[ting] a double watch over all her by-pathes', and 'in the more noted occasions', he suggests, 'it were not amisse to take a peculiar Catalogue of them, by some Characters onely knowne unto our selves'.²² Counselling him on the acquisition of wisdom through experience, Thomas Scott urged his reader to 'Cast your eyes backe to *Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, David*, and all the servants of God'.²³ But notwithstanding his admiration for these scriptural worthies, Scott's most fulsome praise is reserved for Solomon, who 'though in his other words and writings he excell other men, yet in his *Ecclesiastes*, (which is a **survey**, a **review**, a censure of all [,] both of his life, his words, and workes, and written in age after all this addition of experience) he therein excels himself'.²⁴ Thus promoted, Solomon's *Ecclesiastes* becomes a textual testimony to the importance of continually re-viewing and re-vising.

Thomas Scott may or may not have applauded Jeremiah Dyke's casting of Bedford as a Solomon-like exemplum. At any rate, Daniel's assiduous linking of literal vision and revision to figurative, spiritual vigilance, has still more in common with the method of his contemporary, the puritan William Gouge, who speaks in a manner similar to Daniel of 'their blindnesse who can see no matter of thanksgiving'. Those who neglect God's gifts, who '**see and will not see**', and who 'know there is abundant matter of thanksgiving, & yet will **take no notice** of any at all', are here compared unfavourably to the more 'carefull' observers of this duty.²⁵ After some digression, Gouge's criticism of such stubborn negligence gives way to a discussion 'of the causes of drowsinesse', against which 'both body & spirit are carefully to be rowsed up'. Only when armed with Gouge's 'directions for watchfulnesse' are mind and body equipped to do battle with the 'abundance of bye, wandring, vaine, earthly, wicked

²² Thomas Riley, *The Triall of Conscience* (London, 1639), sig. C6v.

²³ Thomas Scott, *The Belgicke Pismire* (London, 1622), p. 45.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ William Gouge, *The Whole-Armor of God or the Spirituall Furniture to Keepe Safe Every Christian Souldier* (London, 1616), p. 415-16 (emphasis mine).

thoughts, cares, lusts, and other such things, which like vapours arise in our soules ... [and] add much unto our naturall dulnesse and drowsinesse'.²⁶

Gouge's allusion to these 'wandering ... earthly ... thoughts' would have been recognised by early modern readers as a warning about the perils of 'carnal' security. As David Gunby explains, Renaissance theologians 'distinguished between two kinds of security, or over-confidence: "spiritual" security comprised an undue confidence in the certainty of salvation; "carnal" security an equally dangerous concentration on this life, and indifference to the next'.²⁷ In *A Wakening of Worldlings*, Martin Day makes explicit the connection between spiritual negligence and 'drowsinesse', asserting, in grim and ominous tones, that 'as sleepe':

the kinseman of Death ... bindeth up all the sences of the body; so that (for the time) there seemes to be little difference betweene a man and an Idoll, which hath eies, and seeth not ... So the worldly, secure and carelesse (falsely called Christian) seeth not, either the bountie or beautie of Divine Benefits ... or the brightnesse and sharpness of the sword of Judgements, hanging over his head to terrifie him.²⁸

The popularity of texts such as *The True Watch. Or a Direction for the Examination of our Spiritual Estate*, reprinted in various forms an astonishing eighteen times before 1648, attests not only to the didactic proclivities of its author, John Brinsley, but to the felt need of his readers to escape the terrifying consequences suffered by those who 'see and will not see'.²⁹ Other spiritual physicians prescribed specific 'remedies' for the 'sleeping evil'.³⁰ Without knowing anything at all about the reception of texts such as Leonard Wright's *A Summons for Sleepers*, Henoah Clapham's *The Sinners Sleepe*, or the anonymous

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 492-4.

²⁷ David C. Gunby, ed., *John Webster: Three Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 445.

²⁸ Martin Day, *A Wakening of Worldlings*, in *A Monument of Mortalitie* (London, 1629), sigs. A1r-v.

²⁹ John Brinsley, *The True Watch. Or a Direction for the Examination of our Spirituall Estate* (London, 1606).

³⁰ See the anonymous *Drowsie Disease; or, An Alarme to Awake Church-Sleepers* (London, 1638), reprinted as *An Alarme to Wake Church Sleepers*, in 1640 and 1644.

Drowsie Disease, their mere existence must bear witness to the strength and vigour of this linguistic economy in early modern England, and to her subjects' familiarity with this particular set of leitmotifs.

'That it is the Dutie of every one to watch' the 'Scripture urgeth', declares Samuel Torshell in *The Saints Humiliation*.³¹ 'It were easie to abound in Quotations', he adds, and proves it by producing a string of places in which variations on this injunction might be found. Omitted from the list (which Torshell admits to curtailing for fear of trespassing on time better spent watching) Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians exhibits a similar preoccupation with watching, sleeping and waking. In Chapter five, Paul lectures the Thessalonians on the necessity of preparing for the Lord's coming, urging them to be vigilant, 'for ye your selves knowe perfectly, that the day of the Lord shall come, even as a thiefe in the night'. Never the most reticent of apostles, Paul's object here is not to upbraid the recipients of his letter. Rather, he affirms their status as 'brethren [who] are not in darkenes':

Yee are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, neither of darkenesse. / Therefore let us not sleepe as do other, but let us watch and be sober. / For they that sleepe, sleepe in the night, and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night. / But let us which are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast plate of faith and love, and of the hope of salvation for an helmet.

Addressed to the Thessalonians, of whose alertness and sobriety he seems assured, Paul's epistle simultaneously praises their qualities and works to distinguish them from others, namely 'they [who] shall say, peace and safetie'. Upon such careless Christians, he warns, 'shall come ... sudden destruction ... and they shall not escape'.³²

Admittedly, there hangs about all these texts the piquant aroma of hell-fire; so much so that we may well ask how appropriate it is (even as part of an historicist project) to read Shakespearean drama in the light of such polemics. In

³¹ *The Saints Humiliation* (London, 1633), p. 18.

³² Geneva Bible (1587), *The First Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, V: 2-8.

the case of *Othello*, however, it seems more than usually justifiable. Before late twentieth-century criticism squared up to the vexed question of its eponymous hero's race, several critics had noticed the religiousity of *Othello* — how many of its speeches are 'Christian in ring and signification'.³³ Norman Rabkin went so far as to claim that 'nowhere else in Shakespeare are we led to think more explicitly in Christian terms'; that 'of all the tragic heroes Othello is the most emphatically Christian'.³⁴ For the most part, however, these accounts tended to quarrel over matters eschatological, or to highlight specific biblical echoes, rather than considering the less obvious implications that Othello's religion has for the play as a whole.³⁵ One important aspect of Othello's Christianity so far uninvestigated, I would argue, is the commitment he shares with Dyke and Gouge to staving off the evils of negligence. In the first scene in which he and Desdemona are brought together to account for themselves, the newly married Othello is adamant that his wife will never make him an authority that neglects all office. Thus he assures his superiors:

And heaven defend your souls that you think
I will your serious and great business scant
When she is with me. No, when light-winged toys
Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
My speculative and officed instrument,
That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm

³³ Robert H. West, 'The Christianness of *Othello*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.4 (1964): 333-43, at p. 333. The measure of this very decisive shift in critical attention may be taken from Ania Loomba's assertion in an essay printed in 1996 that a 'recent MLA bibliographical search showed up nearly 400 essays on *Othello* produced in the last five years, most of them including some discussion of race'. See her 'Shakespeare and Cultural Difference', in Terence Hawkes, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares, Volume 2* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 165.

³⁴ Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 63.

³⁵ West's article, for example, is in part a response to Paul N. Siegel's 'The Damnation of Othello', *Papers of the Modern Language Association of America* 68 (1953): 1068-78, as is Edward Hubler's 'The Damnation of Othello: Some Limitations on the Christian View of the Play', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9 (1958): 295-300. Hubler's response is itself answered by Siegel on pp. 435-6 of the same issue. See also Lawrence J. Ross, 'World and Chrysolite in *Othello*', *Modern Language Notes* 76 (1961): 683-93; and Lynda E. Boose, 'Othello's "Chrysolite" and the Song of Songs Tradition', *Philological Quarterly* 60 (1981): 427-37. Also, the 'Comment and Bibliography' on *Othello* in Roy Battenhouse, ed., *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension: An Anthology of Commentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 415-18.

And all indign and base adversaries
Make head against my estimation.³⁶

David Jeffrey and Patrick Grant take this speech as evidence both of Othello's overriding concern with reputation and of his belief that even his marriage is 'readily imbued with implications for fame'.³⁷ Other critics, Edward Snow and James Calderwood among them, have detected in Othello's words a 'pathological male animus towards sexuality' that appears, significantly in Othello's case, 'at the point where sexuality comes into conflict with the hero's military business'.³⁸ Yet it ought not to be forgotten that the war in which Othello is engaged is a Christian war, as he himself remembers until the end. And whilst this testimony underlines his willingness to smite the Turkish dog, his promise not to 'scant' this Christian business, nor to let Cupid 'seel' his eyes with 'wanton dullness', also obey the 'directions for watchfulness' set down for Gouge's soldierly Christian.

As confident as they sound, Othello's words are too hastily uttered. Instead of using his 'speculative' instrument to contemplate his 'serious and great business' he becomes the 'supervisor' lying in wait to 'grossly gape on / Behold [his young wife] topped' (3.3.397-8). Before long (and much to the subsequent disgust of Rymer) he looks only to Desdemona's linen — that token of 'remembrance' (1.2.95) she lets 'drop by negligence' (1.3.15), whilst attempting to bind a forehead made painful 'with watching' (1.2.89). As Othello's faith in her crumbles, Desdemona's negligence becomes a 'fault'; her misplacing of the handkerchief proof positive of her failure to 'take heed' (3.4.67). This sinister rehearsal of Gouge's insistence on the 'great neede of watchfulness' is repeated again by Othello in Act V: 'Take heed, / Take heed of perjury', he warns her, for 'thou art on thy death-bed' (5.2.50-1).

³⁶ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997), 1.3.267-75. All subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁷ David L. Jeffrey and Patrick Grant, 'Reputation in *Othello*', in Battenhouse, ed., *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension*, p. 421.

³⁸ James L. Calderwood, *The Properties of 'Othello'* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 76. See also Edward A. Snow, 'Sexual Anxiety and the Male Order of Things in *Othello*', *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 388-412.

Too discomfoting for a bedtime story, Shakespeare's story is nonetheless obsessed with bedtime. The strangulation of a wife lying on honeymoon sheets provides a terrible but fitting conclusion for a play so dominated by nocturnal business, in which half-dressed people are routinely plucked untimely from their beds to deal with disputes in the small hours.³⁹ Symbolically, according to David Bevington, 'the swift and violent action in *Othello*, occurring so often at night, makes use of visual signs to stress the blindness of human endeavour'.⁴⁰ At another level, the tragedy's repeated plunges into obscurity are necessary for the purpose of verisimilitude. Iago's machinations work better under cover of darkness. His plan still inchoate, the ensign knows that 'Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light' (1.3.402-3).

But the tenebrous atmosphere of *Othello* is significant for other reasons. Read in the light of a Protestant anxiety about the dangers of 'security' (figured variously as an incitement to 'watchfulness' and a mistrust of 'sleep') one scene in particular acquires a compelling new resonance. There is no doubt that Iago's transformation of 'the watch' into a 'flock of drunkards' succeeds in damaging Othello's reputation — angering and shaming him as a leader of men who quarrel privately 'in night, and on the court and guard of safety' (2.3.212). But it also encourages his adoption of a distinctly Pauline tone. 'For Christian shame, put up this barbarous brawl' (1.168), he orders, commanding his own, errant charges, as Paul had the more obedient Thessalonians, to 'let us watch and be sober'. In this context it surely matters that the already inebriated Cassio admits that he 'hope[s] to be saved', and further, that the 'lieutenant is to be saved before the ensign' (II.103-6). In doing so he reveals a spiritual 'security' matched only by the man whom Paul condemned for being 'drunke in the night'. His actions seem to confirm one early modern minister's belief that 'a superlative neglect of

³⁹ The absolute necessity of 'taking heed' is in evidence almost from the moment the play opens, of course, with Iago's instruction to Roderigo to call 'aloud' (1.1.73), 'with like timorous accent and dire yell / As when by night and negligence the fire / Is spied in populous cities' (II.74-6), to 'Awake the snorting citizens with the bell' (1.89), and especially the father who should 'look to' 'his house, his daughter, and his bags' (II.78-9).

⁴⁰ David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 126.

our spiritual wel-fare doth branch out of the pestilent roote of drunkenesse';⁴¹ such behaviour from Cassio, Iago tells Montano, is 'evermore a prologue to his sleep' (1.25). And so Othello denounces his charming lieutenant, as if anxious to dispel Montano's suspicion that the Moor 'sees ... not' this negligence, or worse, that he 'Prizes the virtue that appears in Cassio / And looks not on his evils' (II.129-31).

Bearing in mind this accumulation of associations related to sleeping and waking, negligence and alertness, it is also interesting to find that the scene in which Shakespeare's Othello 'put[s] out the light' marks a departure from the same episode in his source. In Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565) 'Disdemona [gets] out of bed', is floored by a blow from a sand-bag, and presently 'slain by the impious ensign'.⁴² Shakespeare arranges matters somewhat differently by showing Desdemona murdered in the bed to which Othello has sent her, as though she were a child.⁴³ Importantly, Desdemona raises no objections to this, and indeed, demonstrates a singular readiness to go. When Emilia asks how does the 'good lady' recently bewhored, she finds her mistress 'half-asleep' (4.2.99). As her maid unpins her, Desdemona forgets the order of the lines of her song — 'Nay that's not next' (1.52), complaining, absent-mindedly, of how her 'eyes do itch' (1.51). Figuratively speaking, at least, Shakespeare's presentation of Desdemona suggests that she is unable to exercise what William Jeffray called 'Vigilencie, the ever-waking sentinell of the soule of man'. 'And certainly', Jeffray continues, as if writing an uncanny commentary of the fate about to befall her, 'their death is imminent where there is such emminent drowsinesse'.⁴⁴

To speculate that Shakespeare's focus on such imagery is purposeful is also to suggest that in *Othello* he engages with one particular anxiety shared by Dyke, Gouge, and Jeffray alike. The quotation from Jeffray just cited comes

⁴¹ Luke Rochfort, *An Antidot for Lazinesse, or a Sermon Against Sloth* (London, 1624), p. 13.

⁴² See Appendix 3 in Honigmann's edition, at p. 383.

⁴³ For a summary of the differences between Cinthio and *Othello* see Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 216n.45. Orlin makes no mention of this particular discrepancy.

⁴⁴ William Jeffray, *The Picture of Patience* (London, 1629), p. 41.

from his slim volume of 1629, *The Picture of Patience* — an encomium of what he calls 'the ornament of womanhood and the touchstone of manhood' (14). Culminating with the rousing assurance that 'the sight of our eyes shall give light to our understanding', Jeffray's text returns time and again to the same rhetoric of watchfulness as is used by Dyke, Day, and Gouge. Here again, for instance, the somnolent reader is alerted to the dangers lurking in the 'sleepy feare of adversity' and the debilitating 'sleep of securitie', both of which are 'feareful' and 'dreadfull' (42).

Considering its relative brevity, moreover, the priority this text gives to paying attention is far in excess of the attention it receives from any other of those writers. Around a third of the way through his discussion, Jeffray evokes the authority of St. Ambrose to claim that '*in comparison ... of such as be negligent in divine matters, they are to be called perfect, who with all careful diligence doe walke in the wayes to perfection*'.⁴⁵ But even without the backing of this early church father, Jeffray's text could still be accused of protesting too much. Its author's dilemma is more pronounced than that of Dyke or Gouge, but all three are clearly labouring under their obligation to stress the *active* virtue that must belong to the good Christian, who must also be charitable, forgiving, meek, and humble.⁴⁶ Patience, as Gouge points out, is an essential component of the armour of God, but one that rejects confrontation in favour of sitting still and quiet — of turning, as it were, a blind eye to provocation. The tension latent in this formula is made manifest even in Gouge's choice of metaphor, the 'shoes of patience'.⁴⁷ Emblematically, at least, 'Patience' is usually shown seated, but

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 24-5.

⁴⁶ According to Gerald J. Schiffhorst, 'Christian patience emphasises charity, forgiveness, meekness, and humility — a quality which, in contrast to the pagan view, recognises the weakness of human reason and will when unsupported by divine strength'. See his *The Triumph of Patience: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Orlando: University Presses of Florida, 1978), p. 7 and *passim*.

⁴⁷ Gouge's accoutrements are thus a variation on the 'armour specified by St Paul in Eph. 6:11 for spiritual warfare — helmet of salvation, breastplate of righteousness, girdle of truth, shoes of peace, shield of faith, and sword of the spirit'. See Sandra J. Pyle, *Mirth and Morality of Shakespeare's Holy Fools* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), p. 30.

Gouge takes great care to inject a certain kinetic energy into his own account.⁴⁸

'We know', he says, 'that though shooes and greaves make not the way plaine without stones, stubs and thornes':

yet they make a man better able to tread on them, and pass thorow, or over them, and keepe his legs or feet from being galled or pricked. So Patience enableth us well to beare all troubles, and with some quietnesse to pass them over, and it keepeth the soule from being pierced: yea, it maketh great and heavy burdens seeme much lighter than otherwise they would.⁴⁹

Jeffray is under even greater pressure than Gouge to distinguish between two kinds of behaviour, one of which is commendable and one of which is not, but which are equally concerned with neglecting things. The *raison d'être* of his text is to praise a quality he claims 'makes *Troubles* and *Calamities* the *Foyle* of her Lustre' by exercising a 'heavenly Neglect'.⁵⁰ That Jeffray must use the word 'neglect' under any circumstances, given its oft-invoked negative moral value, attests to the difficulty involved in proving a quality active that actually insists upon doing nothing at all.⁵¹

So what might this add to our understanding of Desdemona? Potentially quite a lot. *Pace* the old saying, Patience is not a virtue. Indeed, in Pieter Bruegel's famous engravings of the Virtues and Vices, Patience occupies a curious limbo position between the two groups of cuts — combining in one

⁴⁸ For a summary of early modern emblematic representations of Patience see Schiffhorst, *The Triumph of Patience*, pp. 13-31. Although he gives two examples of Patience standing — manacled from above in Achille Bocchi's *Patientia*, and on a squared stone in Wither's *Constante Fiducia* — he admits that 'more typical of the emblematic representations of Patience are those by Ripa (1603) and ... Brueghel (*Patientia*, 1554), which show her seated on a rock'. Schiffhorst also claims that 'Shakespeare often conceived of Patience as a seated, female statue-like figure', as is clear from the 'two enigmatic Patience similes in *Pericles* and *Twelfth Night*', and 'less conspicuous lines': Patience is a 'virtue fix'd' in *Troilus and Cressida* and is typically described as 'unmov'd', as in *The Comedy of Errors* (14).

⁴⁹ Gouge, *The Whole-Armor*, p. 188.

⁵⁰ Jeffray, *Picture*, p. 13.

⁵¹ John Sym, for example, in his *Lifes Preservative Against Self-Killing* (London, 1637), claims that 'the third signe of spirituall life in man' is 'his comfortable suffering for the things belonging to that life ... by the manner of his undergoing of afflictions, in voluntary and active submission,

image the motifs kept separate in its fourteen companion pieces. Lisa Jardine's suggestion that, when Shakespeare's long suffering female characters, like Desdemona, 'shift into patient resignation and waiting' they fall 'naturally into the postures expected of them' and 'become patient Griseldas', makes her position even more morally fraught.⁵² For, 'like allegorical representations in general, the emblem of Patience is ambiguous, saying one thing and meaning something else — indeed saying many things and meaning many things'.⁵³ As the 'picture of patience', of course, Desdemona does not 'say many things' — that is the whole point. But in this role she is incontrovertibly ambiguous. Othello may have quite unwittingly got it right when he admits he 'think[s] his wife be honest and think[s] she is not' (3.3.38-9).

When combined with the associations of negligence which stick so tenaciously to Desdemona, her confidence that she will be saved, and her pleading for one more half hour of life bear traces of the 'securitie' Martin Day described in terms of the 'sleep' that 'bindeth up the sences of the body'. By associating Othello with the rhetoric of fastidious watchfulness, and Desdemona with that frequently used to describe spiritual laxity, Shakespeare asks probing questions about the viability of such a passively 'active' virtue. In spite of the contempt in which F.R. Leavis held Othello's 'blinkers', Desdemona's status as a good Christian woman is wholly dependent upon her ability to ignore what is in front of her. So is there any way in which such a desideratum might be reconciled with the suggestion, made by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, that 'the mind suffers in dignity, when we endure evil only by self-deception and looking another way'?⁵⁴ That the dramatist's answer to this question was 'no, there is not', is evident from his treatment of the subject in *Othello*, and the

and not only passive, or by way of coaction, and inforcement ... but induring with joyfulness' (37-8).

⁵² Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, 2nd edn. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983), p. 184.

⁵³ Martha Ronk, 'Viola's (Lack of) Patience', *Centennial Review* 37.2 (1993): 384-99, at p. 389.

⁵⁴ Francis Bacon, *Meditationes Sacrae*, cited in Paul H. Kocher, 'Francis Bacon on the Drama', in Richard Hosely, ed., *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama: In Honor of Hardin Craig* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1962), p. 305.

answer itself, I think, is responsible for the intractable moral ambiguity of Desdemona's position.

But Desdemona has no need to assume allegorical dimensions to be complicit in a project that involves 'bear[ing] all troubles, and with some quietness ... pass[ing] them over'.⁵⁵ In fact, although unusual, her situation is perhaps not very different from the one Francis Bacon said was 'commonly seen' when 'women that marry husbands of their own choosing against their friends consents, if they never be so ill used, yet you shall seldom see them complain, but to set a good face on it'.⁵⁶ My own concern is with how Shakespeare's newly-wed Venetian manages that. Certainly, she never complains about him, but nor does she apply what the vernacular rhetorician Henry Peacham called 'plaisters of pleasaunt words' in the service of excusing Othello to the witnesses of his 'much changed' behaviour.⁵⁷ Or, at least, she does not always do so. While Othello seems merely to be distracted, Desdemona willingly searches for extenuating circumstances to explain how it is that her 'lord is not [her] lord'. 'Something sure of state', she reasons,

Either from Venice, or some unhatched practice
Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
Hath puddled his clear spirit, and in such cases
Men's natures wrangle with inferior things
Though great ones are their object ...
Nay, we must think men are not gods
Nor of them look for such observancy
As befits the bridal.⁵⁸

But as Othello's behaviour grows more violent, her responses to it alter. After he strikes her in public, Desdemona pauses only to register how little she deserves the blow, then leaves his sight. Their next encounter finds Othello insulting her verbally, yet in neither instance does she resume her hunt for

⁵⁵ Gouge, *The Whole-Armor*, p. 188.

⁵⁶ Francis Bacon, *Of the Colours of Good and Evil*, in Brian Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 97-101, at p. 101.

⁵⁷ Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1971), sig. I2v. A facsimile of the 1577 edition.

⁵⁸ *Othello*, 3.4.125; 3.4.141-51.

excuses. In the circumstances this is not surprising. Reluctant to 'put [her father] in impatient thoughts / By being in his eye' (1.3.243-4), having 'love[d] the Moor to live with him' (1.249), then followed that Moor to Cyprus, Desdemona has all but severed her Venetian ties. In a somewhat unhappy application of the proverb, our heroine has made the bed in which she now must lie. So if Othello later subjects her to so 'very much' that 'it would not be believed in Venice' (4.1.241-2), she still cannot confront Lodovico with a full-scale exhibition of Peacham's *medela* — those plasters of pleasant words with which, he says, we seek to heal the 'offences of our friends' that 'are so great that we cannot honestly defend them, or so manifest that we cannot well denye them'.⁵⁹

This rhetorical first-aid kit tucked out of sight, its restorative powers denied her, what does Desdemona do instead? She sets a 'good face' on matters involving her husband by proceeding in a manner not unlike the one Thomas Wilson recommended for handling such blatant displays of wrongdoing. The gist of his advice is summarised in *The Arte of Rhetorique*'s marginalia: 'Matters, hard to avoide', it announces, 'shuld alwaies bee past over, as though we saw them not at al'.⁶⁰ In the body of the text, Wilson makes it obvious that he is addressing defenders of their own cause: 'if any matter be laied against us', he says, 'whiche by reason can hardely bee avoyded, or the whiche is so open, that none almoste can deny, it were wisdom in confutyng all other reasons, to passe over this one, as though we sawe it not, and therefore speake never a worde of it' (38).

What Wilson seems to be advocating — assuming this strategy could be used to vindicate others as well as oneself — is that a defender simply ignore any misdemeanour too momentous to be publicly excused. Wilson doesn't use the word 'ignore', however, and neither does Shakespeare, but (according to the *OED*) no-one used the word in this sense at that time. The first appearance of the word 'ignore' to mean 'disregarding' a matter 'intentionally', or shutting 'one's

⁵⁹ Peacham, *Garden*, sig. I2v.

⁶⁰ Thomas Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), p. 38.

eyes to it', recorded there dates from 1801. This does not mean that its sense did not exist either, of course, just that a different word described it. And in keeping with the distinctly physical manoeuvre Wilson recommends for passing a matter over, 'as though we sawe it not', it is unsurprising to find it replaced, on many occasions, with the word 'wink'. To 'wink' today means to close one's eyes momentarily; indeed, it means to keep one eye open. In early modern contexts, the word is used to refer to all kinds of partial-sightedness, both literal and metaphorical.

It occurs in religious contexts; in Abraham Fleming's *Monomachie of Motives in the Mind of Man* the practice of 'winking' is mentioned on no fewer than three occasions. Most pertinently, it appears in the 'prayer for the virtue of Due Correction' which, in Fleming's diametrical schema, as we saw in Chapter III, repulses the assault made on it by its 'contrarie', the 'Excusing of Sin'. 'Open rebuke is better than secret love', claims Fleming, targeting his prayer for strength to effect this correction at those inclined to 'neglect this Christian dutie'. 'O take from us all vaine motions, which may withdrawe us from rating them, that most apparentlie offend thy divine Majestie', he begs:

and not to seeme blind, or to winke at their offences, least we be counted partakers of their wickednes: knowing that thy sonne our Saviour giveth us this for a lesson to be learned & followed, namelie, when we see our brother commit anie trespas, to rebuke him, that he may repent and obtaine forgiveness.⁶¹

Here, Fleming's use of the word 'winke' refers to a dereliction of duties, which translates as a refraining from action, or more properly, from speaking out against the perpetrator of some 'trespas'. In John Carpenter's opinion, God taught something rather different: namely, 'how unseemely a thing it is, either for children to note or display their owne fathers faults; or for the inferiours to be

⁶¹ Abraham Fleming, *A Monomachie of Motives in the Mind of Man* (London, 1582), pp. 73 and 77.

judges and correctors of their superiours'. Indeed, he claims, 'the Scripture telleth':

that *Shem* and *Japhet*, the two sonnes of *Noah*, did so dissemble their fathers faults, that they did not onely care, not to behold them, but also had great regard to cover and conceale them and therefore *they went towards him to cover him their faces being turned away*. And the same Scripture saith, that because *Cham* had unreverently revealed his fathers fault, he was much disliked of his brethren, and of his father.⁶²

Summarising this example in his text's marginalia, Carpenter informs us that 'Shem and Japhet winked at and covered their fathers faults'. Placed side by side, these two examples, both taken from religious texts, give some sense of the intractable ambiguity involved in the deployment of this strategy. It is further problematised, moreover, in a text whose generic proximity to *Othello* makes it even more pertinent to this issue. The text in question is John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Unlike Desdemona's father, Brabantio, who remains blissfully unaware that his daughter is also a wife until it is too late, the Duchess of Malfi's brothers are ever alert to the threat posed by her marrying a second 'husband of [her] own choosing against her friends consents'. Visiting her chamber early in the play, Ferdinand uses a very unfriendly tone to warn his sister that 'the joys' of this (as yet hypothetical) marriage night, '[t]hose lustful pleasures, are like heavy sleeps / Which do forerun man's mischief', and having thus made his position transparent, he departs.⁶³ Already resolved, having concealed her beloved Antonio behind the arras, the Duchess takes no notice. In the face of such flagrant fraternal opposition, her decision to disregard her brothers' commination is crucial. 'Shall this move me?', she asks Cariola, her maid:

If all my royal kindred
Lay in my way unto this marriage:

⁶² John Carpenter, *A Preparative to Contentation* (London, 1597), p. 93.

⁶³ John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan, 3rd edn. (London: A & C Black, 1993), 1.2.245-6. Subsequent references are to this edition.

I'll'd make them my low foot-steps. And even now,
 Even in this hate ...
 So I, through frights and threat'nings, will assay
 This dangerous venture. Let old wives report
 I winked, and chose a husband.⁶⁴

In the Duchess's decision to defy her brothers, one can imagine a version of a scene never written by Shakespeare, in which Desdemona stands shivering at the water's edge, waiting to board the gondola that will take her to be married, reflects on the inevitability of her father's disapproval, and elects to go anyway. And if Desdemona's situation is similar enough to the Duchess's to suggest that Brabantio's daughter, too, has 'winked and chose a husband', there is consequently little to surprise in the fact that, once married, the Duchess declares herself 'now ... blind' (1.2.407).

The progress of the Duchess's marriage is very different from that of Desdemona's, of course; Desdemona is killed by her husband, the Duchess at the order of the Cardinal and Ferdinand. In addition to this, there is no evidence in Webster's tragedy to suggest that his heroine's initial act of defiant winking results, as it does in Desdemona's case, in her subsequently being obliged to turn a blind eye to (or as Francis Bacon put it, 'to set a good face on') the ill-use she suffers at her *husband's* hands. The Duchess is nothing if not dignified, and it is hard to imagine either her or Desdemona reminding her spouse, in the manner of the 'jealous' wife in John Taylor's *Juniper Lecture*, how she forsook 'many a good match only for [his] sake, when all [her] friends and kindred were utterly against it'. 'Thus by your lewd course and company you are made a laughing-stock', she adds, venomously, 'and I poor woman [am] pointed at as I go along the streete, for bearing it so patiently'.⁶⁵ Yet all three are wives, and, as such, might be expected to possess the virtues of what Mary Beth Rose calls the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1.2.260-68.

⁶⁵ John Taylor, *A Juniper Lecture*, 2nd edn. (London, 1639), pp. 41-2.

'heroics of marriage' — 'the inner strength and courage required to act when necessary, but also to refrain from direct action, to suffer and endure'.⁶⁶

Thus far I have connected Desdemona's behaviour to the paradoxically passive action of 'winking' by examining semantic and ideological associations embedded in *Othello* and other early modern texts. Justification for this strategy is perhaps provided by what Ralph Berry identifies as Shakespeare's 'exceptional sense of the dynamic relations' between the 'metaphoric' and the 'literal' and 'hence of the impress of language upon the human mind'.⁶⁷ But however acute Shakespeare's sense of 'the reciprocity of metaphor and literal' might be, there is no escaping the fact that the word 'wink' appears nowhere in *Othello*. In *Romeo and Juliet*, however, the Prince gestures toward the sense of the word related to 'intentionally disregarding' a matter when he tells the heads of the feuding houses how he 'for winking at [their] discords too / Ha[s] lost a brace of kinsmen'. In *The Tempest*, the 'perpetual wink' of which Antonio speaks means death, as does the 'lasting wink' Leontes intends for Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*, though here the same word is also used by Perdita's clownish brother to refer to sleep.⁶⁸ Apparently, Shakespeare realised long before Dickens's Pip that 'wonders may be done with an eye by hiding it'.⁶⁹

Returning from the evident versatility Shakespeare found in this word to Desdemona's situation may, therefore, be of help in interpreting her rather odd behaviour in the scene in which Emilia prepares her for bed. It is Emilia, in fact, who wishes Desdemona had 'never seen' Othello (4.3.16), an aspiration Desdemona doesn't share: 'my love doth so approve him', she says, 'That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns / — Prithee unpin me — have grace and favour' (ll.17-19). It is at this point, according to the author of a collection of

⁶⁶ Mary Beth Rose, 'The Heroics of Marriage in *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi*', in Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether, eds., *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

⁶⁷ Ralph Berry, *The Shakespearean Metaphor: Studies in Language and Form* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), p. 5.

⁶⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Methuen, 1980), 5.3.293-4; *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1998), 2.1.280; *The Winter's Tale*, ed. J.H.P. Pafford, rpt. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.2.317.

⁶⁹ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 73.

Meditations for 'Noble' ladies, that Desdemona should 'fall to [her] *Audite* for the day past'.⁷⁰ Instead, she speaks a series of distracted *non sequiturs*, interrupted with snatches of a song she regrets will not 'go from [her] mind' (1.29). As becomes eerily apparent only in performance, this song of 'Willow' is a kind of lullaby Desdemona sings to herself. More significantly, though, her admission that she has 'much to do / But to hang [her] head all at one side / And sing it like poor Barbary' (11.29-31) coincides yet again with William Gouge's disapproving characterisation of those who 'purposely set themselves to sleep'. In 'composing themselves to such gestures as make them sleepe', he says, 'they hang downe their heads'.⁷¹

She has been 'half-asleep' before, of course, in the aftermath of Othello's attack on her fidelity, and now the comment makes more sense. Desdemona's readiness to 'sleep' (or die) clearly owes to her ability to show patience by exercising a 'heavenly Neglect', or as Gouge put it, 'to beare all troubles, and with some quietness to pass them over'. But it is also linked to her tendency to 'wink': 'to passe over' a matter 'hard to avoide', 'as though [she] sawe it not'. Her dazed response to Emilia's inquiry after her 'lord' on this occasion was that she had 'none', which temporary disowning of her husband must be among the most effective means of 'passing over' his actions she could possibly have chosen.

At this point I would like to set Wilson's illustration of the best way of dealing with matters 'hard to avoide' alongside another rhetorical figure with which it has affinities: George Puttenham's *paralepsis*, or The Passager. At first sight Puttenham's Passager does bear a striking resemblance to Wilson's brand of damage limitation; where Wilson advocates a 'passing over', the Passager involves speaking 'as if we set but light of the matter, and that therefore we do passe it over slightly'.⁷² Yet in certain respects it differs crucially, for

⁷⁰ *Three Small and Plaine Treatises of Divinitie* (London, 1620), p. 23. Part of a meditation for 'when your mayd is getting you to bed'.

⁷¹ Gouge, *The Whole-Armor*, p. 494.

⁷² George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 194.

Puttenham's figure incorporates a pause, the express purpose of which is to draw attention to its hasty bypassing of a crime. In the same way, Henry Peacham described *praeteritio* as a 'pretend omitting': 'when we say something, in saying we will not say it'.⁷³ Both this figure and Puttenham's Passager owe a clear debt to the Latin *paralipsis*, which 'occurs when we say that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying'.⁷⁴ As the author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* explained it, there are several places in which this figure might be usefully employed, but particularly in a matter 'which it is not pertinent to call specifically to the attention of others, because there is advantage in making only an indirect reference to it, or because the direct reference ... cannot be made clear, or can be easily refuted'. In such cases, he continues, 'it is of greater advantage to create a suspicion by *paralipsis* than to insist directly on a statement that is refutable'.⁷⁵

Although Puttenham took classical texts on rhetoric as sources, he seldom failed to stamp his own unique hallmark upon his explication of the figures and tropes. Where the Passager differs from the pseudo-Ciceronean *paralipsis* is in Puttenham's likening its technique of seeming not 'to know a thing, and yet we know it well enough', to 'the manner of women'.

The comparison does not hold in the case of *Othello*, where the Passager is used far more frequently by male than by female characters. As many critics have observed, much of Iago's success derives from his ability to create suspicion by seeming not to insist on anything. In the words of Patricia Parker, Iago "sets Othello on the rack" through pauses, single words and phrases that seem to suggest something secret or withheld, a withholding that fills the Moor with the desire to know more'.⁷⁶ Iago requires no 'diabolic intellect' to know that the consequence of his wishing that Othello's 'wisdom / From one that so

⁷³ Peacham, *Garden*, sig. S2v.

⁷⁴ *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, rpt. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.26.37.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Shakespeare From the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 229.

imperfectly conceits / Would take no notice' (3.3.151-3), will be that Othello takes the keenest interest in what his ensign leaves tantalisingly half-unsaid.

Iago's careful cultivation of suspicion affects Othello's relationship with others too. As well as being an editor's nightmare, Iago's tortuous exclamation in the fourth Act — 'What he might be; if what he might, he is not, / I would to heaven he were!' (4.1.271-2) — is also preceded by a version of the Passager. 'He's that he is: I may not breathe my censure', Iago mutters, through apparently tightly buttoned lips. Appearing to muse aloud: 'yet would I knew / That stroke would prove the worst', Iago moulds and shapes Othello's 'worst' before the Senate's very eyes. His master's crimes will be evident to those who 'shall observe him', says Iago, pretending to take refuge in the irrefutable claim that it is 'not honesty in [him] to speak / What [he] has seen and known'. For 'honesty' Lodovico reads 'loyalty', as Iago intends he should, and is confirmed in his suspicion that Othello's ensign is seeming not to know the thing he knows very well indeed.

As if having learned from Iago's example, moreover, Othello himself shows an increasing propensity to use *paralepsis*, even in private conversations with Desdemona. There is excellent irony in the fact that one of Othello's most famous speeches is punctuated by an example of the rhetorical figure *paralepsis*, which he uses apparently for his own benefit: 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul! / **Let me not name it to you**, you chaste stars, / It is the cause' (5.2.1-3). Indeed, there is more than a passing resemblance (in subject matter, if not in style) between the lines of verse offered by Puttenham in illustration of the figure we may 'liken to the manner of women':

I hold my peace and will not say for shame,
The much untruth of that uncivell dame:
For if I should her coullours kindly blaze,
It would so make the chaste ears amaze &c.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Puttenham, *Arte*, p. 194.

and Othello's response to Desdemona's baffled inquiry as to the nature of her 'ignorant sin' (4.2.71). Only she and her husband are present, but still he storms:

I should make very forges of my cheeks
That would to cinders burn up modesty
Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed!
Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon winks,
The bawdy wind that kisses all it meets
Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth
And will not hear't. What committed!
Impudent strumpet!⁷⁸

In this exchange, often referred to as the 'brothel scene', Desdemona is apparently incapable of making excuses for herself. The only defence she offers is her ignorance of Othello's charge; that she 'understand[s] a fury in his words / But not the words' (4.2.32-3). Yet here again we encounter difficulties. Othello's inability to countenance his wife's protestation of 'ignorant sin' is ironically exacerbated by his pathological adherence to the Christian's 'directions for watchfulnesse'; his blustering disbelief in her ignorance mixed up and shot through with a puritanical suspicion of the motives of those who claim not to see or know. Once more, Othello reveals the worry he shares with Dyke about 'the shifts [man's heart] useth for excusing of sinfull actions'; how prone it is to invent 'witty and colourable excuses and extenuations'.⁷⁹ These deceitful excuses exist in many forms — the third one among many listed by Dyke is 'Ignorance, and want of learning' (148). Whether *wilful* and *affected* — as in the ignorance of those who 'do willingly shut their owne eyes, that they might not see' (137), or *plaine* and *simple* — ignorance, according to Dyke, is no excuse. For even in the latter instance, the plea of 'ignorance, though it may extenuate, yet it cannot altogether excuse' (137). And this is as it should be, he claims, for 'as the *Princes* lawes are printed & published, and therefore known, unlesse we be either carelesse or wilful; so also are Gods' (137). 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' is, of course, the law Othello believes Desdemona to have smashed to

⁷⁸ *Othello*, 4.2.75-82.

⁷⁹ Dyke, *Mystery*, pp. 142 and 145.

pieces. Her ignorance of it is no excuse for him; her plea reminiscent of the 'ignoramus', meaning 'we know nothing of this', written by juries on the back of bills for which they had failed to find sufficient evidence.⁸⁰ Othello mocks this plea: there is enough evidence, as far as he is concerned, to justify his overwriting Desdemona's 'fair paper' with the verdict of 'whore' (4.2.72-3).

Once convinced that Desdemona is more Passager than honest, then, Othello cannot exorcise his belief that she is only seeming not 'to know a thing and yet [she] know[s] it well inough'. As Iago reminds him, she is, after all, a woman, and, moreover, comes from Venice, where 'they let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands' (3.3.205-6). It is not long before Desdemona, as one of Iago's 'they' is taken by Othello for 'that cunning whore of Venice' (4.2.91) — a female passer-by of whom her husband vows, 'though that her jesses were my heart-strings, / I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind / To prey at fortune' (3.3.283). Thus, even as he remains half-certain that if his wife is 'false ... then heaven mocks itself', Othello is busy visualising Desdemona as a falcon whose talons pierce his chest: one of those birds of prey, perhaps, that in 1624 Captain Smith called 'passengers', 'because they come seldom' — one of the hawks, even, which, having been 'inseled' by her gentleman owner 'so as she may not see at all', is then 'watch[ed] ... all night and all the next morrow from any sleepe'.⁸¹

This realisation returns us to the problem of blinkers with which we began. *Othello* is a play in which 'words carry with them all the meanings they have worn'.⁸² Here it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish between a person who is the very picture of patience, and one engaged simply in the kind of face-saving project Francis Bacon reserved for 'women that marry husbands of their own choosing against their friends consents'. What are we to make of

⁸⁰ On 'ignoramus' see J.G. Bellamy, *The Criminal Trial in Later Medieval England: Felony Before the Courts from Edward I to the Sixteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 32-3.

⁸¹ Gervase Markham, *The Gentlemans Academie or, The Booke of S. Albans* (London, 1595), pp. 1-2.

⁸² Walter Raleigh, *Style*, 4th edn. (London: Edward Arnold, 1901), p. 26.

Desdemona's losing through 'negligence' the handkerchief Othello has told her to take care of as she would her 'precious eye' (3.4.68)? How are we to read Emilia's condemnation of Othello, as a man she claims has 'killed the sweetest innocent / That e'er did lift up eye' (5.2.197-8), when all the semantic and ideological associations surrounding Desdemona suggest that she has closed them?

Desdemona's moral position in *Othello* is radically ambiguous, and becomes so, I would argue, in the specific context of her bid to excuse her husband. What happens to the women whose attempts to offer excuses are far more overt than Desdemona's will be shown in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter V

A Modest Proposal

Would I knew that manner of asking: to beg were base, and to cooche low
and to carrie an humble shew of entreatie, were too Dog-like that fawnes
on his maister to get a bone from his Trencher: out Curre I cannot abide it,
to put on the shape and habit of this new worlds new found beggars.¹

Perhaps the most important question to ask at the outset of this chapter is what an original audience would have made of Shakespeare's suppliant women. From where might they have assimilated information that allowed them to interpret, contextualise, and make judgements upon fictional women who fell to their knees and asked for things? Early modern audiences would doubtless have been more accustomed to the sight of a prostrate subject than we are, of course. They prayed more for one thing, and also had at their disposal texts such as John Newman's *Looking-Glasse for Petitioners*, a work dedicated solely to the task of showing 'every Christian man and woman' 'what they are to beg at Gods hands, the manner how they are to beg, and the assurance of those things which they do beg'.² These divisions duly noted, Newman proceeds to fill by far largest proportion of his text with an explanation of 'the manner how' an appeal should be made. This section includes some very specific advice on the subject of a petitioner's bodily comportment. A posture expressive of 'Humilitie' is apparently considered a prerequisite. To 'holde downe our heads' and 'knock our breasts' is a good beginning (23), but should be followed by ever greater displays of abjection. The petitioner wishing to be heard must also 'descend, not downe into the earth, but cast [himself] upon the earth' (25).

This directive seems straightforward enough: a petitioner must prove himself humble in God's eyes by abandoning an upright posture. Some dozen pages later, however, Newman closes this 'how to' section by claiming only to have shown 'how we must pray in respect of the inward man' (37). Certainly, there are some when they pray who 'fall upon their knees' (37), 'some pray

¹ Henry Porter, *The Pleasant Historie of the Two Angrie Women of Abington* (London, 1599), sig. A2, 'The Prologue'.

² John Newman, *A Looking-Glasse for Petitioners* (London, 1619).

sitting', 'others lay groveling' (38). But ultimately, Newman insists, the posture of a petitioner's body is of no account, for 'it is not the body that the Lord looks upon' but 'the hart' (38). Apparently, David's injunction to 'let us fall down' when we come before God need not necessarily mean just that.³ A petitioner is not obliged to fall to his knees literally, so long as he is willing to undergo this ritual of self-abasement in metaphorical terms.⁴

This writer's insistence on the inconsequentiality of the 'outward manner of praying' is as crucial as it is unusual. In its eagerness to prove just how little a petitioner's posture mattered, Newman's 'looking-glasse' never reflects upon how easily conventional signs of piety, including kneeling, may be manipulated or abused. Many other commentators were more cynical (and clearly more worried than Newman was) about the potential mendacity inherent in corporeal displays of obedience. 'Show me thy humble heart, and not thy knee, / Whose duty is deceivable and false', Shakespeare's York tells Bolingbroke, as the latter drops to the ground at his approach.⁵ Making his nephew feel welcome is not high on York's list of priorities here; rather, his words attest to the immediacy of the threat posed by the 'lying knee' in the early modern imagination. This 'lying knee', as Marjorie Garber has elegantly observed, 'is part of an articulated language of disarticulation, the breakdown, the dislocation, of a ceremonial culture of the body'.⁶ Churchmen like Bishop Launcelot Andrewes who represented prayer as a predominantly physical act of petition consequently laid themselves open to charges of encouraging the evils that infuse public, performative devotion. Within this context, 'a great sorte plaie the hipocrites ...

³ A injunction used in support of kneeling by John Buckeridge in *A Sermon Preached Before His Majestie* (London, 1617), p. 20.

⁴ For religious reformers, as Stephen Greenblatt has shown, 'the figurativeness of language, its ability not to mean what it appears to say, is the key to a correct understanding of scripture'. See his 'Remnants of the sacred in Early Modern England', in Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass, eds., *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 340.

⁵ William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Peter Ure, rpt. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.3.83-4.

⁶ Marjorie Garber, 'Out of Joint', in David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 25.

egregiouslylie', the puritan Philip Stubbes declared, 'and under this cloke of Christianitie ... commit all kinde of Devilrie'.⁷

Stubbes's comment bears witness to the danger inherent in a performative act of 'Christianitie' that can effectively obscure ('cloke') its diametrically opposed intention ('Devilrie'). As Shakespeare's Iago knows, any attempt to assess the sincerity of such gestures will inevitably encounter interpretive difficulties. This he exploits to the full, using it to further his project of poisoning husband against wife by ensuring that Othello, too, understands how radically indeterminable are Desdemona's external displays of religious obedience. From this Iago proceeds to deduce that 'when [Desdemona] seemed to shake, and fear [Othello's] looks, / She loved them most'.⁸ If even the physiological symptoms of terror are simple to fake, how much easier is it for a person to feign subjection by kneeling?⁹

Iago's ability to translate Desdemona's supposed religious hypocrisy to other of her actions has implications for the study of Shakespeare's suppliant women. Of course, neither Volumnia, Paulina or Isabella is shown in the act of pleading to God; but in a culture in which a king was recognised as God's temporal stand-in, and where a husband was the head of his own little commonwealth, Newman's comments are still very relevant indeed. Renaissance commentators themselves drew parallels between petitions made to the *primum*

⁷ Cited in Ramie Targoff, 'The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England', in Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen, eds., *Shakespeare and History* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999), p. 20.

⁸ *Othello*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1999), 3.3.210-11.

⁹ According to a culture suspicious of bodily signs, blushing was the only physiological alteration that could not be faked. See Brian Cummings, 'Animal Passions and Human Sciences: Shame, Blushing and Nakedness in Early Modern Europe and the New World', in Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman, eds., *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999). For the contrary view that 'Elizabethans had little faith in the power of man to conceal the deepest motions of his soul', see John S. Wilks, *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 17. In *A Preparative to Contentation* (London, 1597), John Carpenter supports the idea of the 'readable' face by claiming that malcontented, hypocritical Papists 'may easily be discerned ... and that partly by their faces ... in like sort as the trees are knowne by their leaves and fruits. For ... their cankered hearts cannot but yeelde forth at time and times such a countenance as *Cayn* sometime expressed towards *Abel* his brother, when the Lorde said to him: Why art thou angry? and why is thy countenance abated?' (16-17). Carpenter's comment brings to mind another envious brother, the villainous Don John in *Much Ado*, who is reported to have a face dastardly enough to turn milk.

mobile and those made to his substitutes on earth — and with good reason. Gestures of obedience like kneeling, as David Bevington points out, 'express not a contractual relationship of vow as in hand-clasping and embracing, but a relationship of dependency and subordination'. Less significant than the context of their performance (whether religious or secular) is the fact that these 'gestures are an acknowledgment of inferiority to one whose aid is sought'.¹⁰ It is exactly this claim of hierarchy that Thomas Granger bows to when he recommends 'com[ing] unto God as a poore harmles beggar comes to a King to crave almes'.¹¹

The ease of Granger's comparison in this example is revealing, and, for him, the similarities between religious and secular petitions do not end here. In both contexts, the actual language used in a petition is less important than the manner of its delivery.¹² One point upon which he is particularly insistent is that no entreaty to God will bear fruit unless the petitioner solicits him with 'fervency'. Proceeding with his analogy, Granger demonstrates the 'necessity of fervent prayer' by showing how 'the humble beggar which craveth earnestly, doth speede better than he that asketh carelessly, and much better than he that asketh commandingly'. That Granger should emphasise the desirability of 'earnest' or 'fervent' petitions is of paramount importance.¹³ The English word *fervency* (formed from English *fervence*) derives originally from the Latin *ferventum*, 'boiling' or 'glowing'. What this means is that Granger's main piece of advice to God-fearing petitioners is in essence exactly the same as the advice Quintilian gave to prospective pre-Christian pleaders, some thousand years earlier, in the *Institutio Oratoria*.

This text contains what is probably the most thorough (surviving) treatment of the importance of the system of Roman rhetorical *gestus*. Just as

¹⁰ David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 163.

¹¹ Thomas Granger, *The Blinde-Mans Sermon* (London, 1616), n.p.

¹² 'It is not the body that the Lord lookes upon', agreed John Newman, 'neither is it the words he does respect' (38).

¹³ John Bradford's *Godly Meditations upon the Lords Prayer* (London, 1604), also describes 'Supplication' as 'an earnest and fervent calling upon God for anything' (2). In *The Saints Humiliation* (London, 1633), Samuel Torshell, argues similarly that 'We must have zeale and heate in our prayers; Jam.5.16. The effectual fervent prayer availeth much. Zeale puts the heart into a good temper and apt it for motion, which cannot be without an heate' (71).

men of the cloth like John Newman stressed the insignificance of a petitioner's actual 'words', Quintilian argued that 'the nature of the speech that we have composed within our minds is not so important as the manner in which we produce it'.¹⁴ Along similar lines, the respected classical orator was as anxious as Granger would later prove himself to distinguish between 'fervent' and 'careless' pleading. On this matter Quintilian states his position unequivocally: 'All emotional appeals will inevitably fall flat, unless they are given the fire, that voice, look, and the whole comportment of the body can give them'.¹⁵ Common to both descriptions is the image of the 'glowing' pleader: 'fervent' in Granger's account, 'fiery' in Quintilian's. In Quintilian's opinion, as well as in Granger's, there are no circumstances under which a lukewarm or dispassionate pleader can expect to 'speed':

For when we have done all this, we may still account ourselves only too fortunate if we have succeeded in communicating the fire of our passion to the judge; consequently, we can have no hope of moving him if we speak with languor and indifference, nor of preventing him from yielding to the narcotic influence of our own yawns.¹⁶

To instruct his students in the best way of 'moving' a judge is Quintilian's main aim in this passage. But before we construct from his words a template for the perfect pleader, we should recall for whom, exactly, they were meant. The 'teachers' of the 'future orators' Quintilian is addressing were men; their pupils — the ones 'whom we are training to this end' — were boys.¹⁷ 'The

¹⁴ *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 volumes (London: William Heinemann, 1921), IV, 11.3.2.

¹⁵ On the importance of this tenet see Fritz Graf, 'Gestures and Conventions: the Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, eds., *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 40.

¹⁶ Quintilian, IV, 11.3.3.

¹⁷ Speaking, in Book I of the *Institutes*, of the teacher's duty to 'correct all faults of [his student's] pronunciation', Quintilian concedes that the 'comic actor will also claim a certain amount of our attention, but only in so far as our future orator must be a master of delivery. For I do not of course wish the boy, whom we are training to this end, to talk with the shrillness of a woman or in the tremulous accents of old age' (1.11.1-4). In *A Ritche Storehouse or Treasurie*, trans. T. Browne (London, 1570), Joannes Sturmius also claims to have written his rhetorical treatise for his male pupil: 'wherein I consider what maner of Gentleman I would traine up, that may be

dominant ideology of most of the ancient world offered women no place in public discourse'.¹⁸ And, with a very few exceptions, no substantial alteration to this situation had occurred by the time the *Institutes* was rediscovered by Poggio in the fifteenth century, or used as a pedagogical tool in the two centuries that followed. When Hugh Blair claimed that even the 'dry and tedious' 'technical parts' of the *Institutes* 'may prove of some use' to 'pleaders at the bar', he was not talking to or about women — and this was in 1783.¹⁹ In the period with which we are concerned, 'the place allowed to women within legal settings was carefully circumscribed by rules and by the opinions of observers'.²⁰ Women, as Tim Stretton has shown, could be litigants, but they could not be judges, jurors, or lawyers. Along with heretics, excommunicants and criminals, no woman could plead on behalf of another before a judge.²¹

That the law forbade women from pleading before a judge was a fact. Nevertheless, in the eyes of some contemporary critics, neither that law nor this fact was enough to stop them trying. Barnaby Rich, for one, clearly felt that the legal restrictions imposed on female pleaders did not preclude the possibility of a woman taking any available opportunity to approach some other authority figure and do exactly that.

In a text published in 1613, Rich recounts a story involving four principal characters: the ruler Epaminundas, his captain Polipodius, an unnamed woman, 'openly knowne to be a common Curtizan', and a third man, committed to prison

meete to be a councellor of Emperors and kings, and to have governement in the common welth' (19).

¹⁸ Cheryl Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), p. 19.

¹⁹ From Lecture 34 in Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, cited in S. Michael Halloran, 'Hugh Blair's Use of Quintilian and the Transformation of Rhetoric in the 18th Century', in Winifred Bryan Horner and Michael Leff, eds., *Rhetoric and Pedagogy: Its History, Philosophy, and Practice: Essays in Honor of James J. Murphy* (Mahwah, New Jersey and Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), p. 185. At least one woman did respond to Blair, though not in a 'legal' setting. See Julia Allen, 'The Uses and Problems of a 'Manly' Rhetoric: Mary Wollstonecraft's Adaptation of Hugh Blair's *Lectures* in her *Two Vindications*', in Molly Meijer Wertheimer, ed., *Listening to their Voices: The Rhetorical Activities of Historical Women* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁰ Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 67.

²¹ Ibid. The proscription against heretical, criminal or female pleaders comes from the anonymous *Mirror of Justices*, ed. W.J. Whittaker, Selden Society Reprints 7 (London, 1895), p. 47.

for his loose manner of living, described only as a 'base fellow'.²² Although it has landed him in considerable trouble, this nameless figure's alleged wantonness has not robbed him of supporters. His first champion is the charitably inclined Polipodius, whose argument for the accused's 'inlargement' makes no inroad whatsoever in the ruler's original verdict. This initial disappointment notwithstanding, the base fellow has no real cause for concern. His 'suite' is taken up quickly by the anonymous Curtizan, who, 'comming to *Epaminundus* ... obtained his liberty, and had the prisoner presently delivered unto her' (18). Upon learning of the Curtizan's success, Polipodius is not a little aggrieved. Bravely, he confronts the ruler with the 'unkindnes' of this strange decision, and is told by him to accept the following explanation: 'Content thy selfe Polipodius', *Epaminundus* counsels, 'for if thou couldest advisedly consider of the matter, thou wouldest not let to confesse that the suite was fitter to be granted to a *Curtizan* than to a *Captaine*' (18).

Whether Polipodius is made easy by this reasoning is not a question that occupies Rich. Instead, he drops the story, not to make room for an analysis of either man's motivation, but to pass an unmistakably moral judgement upon the heretofore undisclosed practices of the Curtizan-pleader. The example, Rich admits, causes him to 'note the impudency of these common creatures':

that dare insinuate themselves into any presence, be they
never so great nor never so good and dare adventure to
undertake any suite be it never so base or never so
shamefull, and by this againe I doe further gather, that this
kind of cattle shall prevaile, when those that be honest shall
have a deniall.

In these desperate tones Rich draws to a close, declaring himself 'afraid' that 'there be too many of these women suiters in these dayes if all were knowne' (18). Successfully evoking an image of their author rolling his eyes skyward as he wrote them, these words also bear witness to Rich's automatic correlation of female 'impudency' and sexual incontinence. Only a sexually shameless woman would 'dare' to undertake such a suit; in this instance, in fact, the anonymous

²² Barnaby Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London, 1613), p. 18.

woman's roles as 'common Curtizan' and female pleader seem to be inevitably predicated one on the other. In the words of the early Dutch humanist, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, there 'exists nowhere an orator more persuasive than the least of prostitutes'.²³ Similarly, when Rich admits, regretfully, that 'there be too many of these women suiters in these dayes', it is not clear whether he is objecting to female pleaders *per se*, or simply calling for a crackdown on the work done by female inhabitants of the stews. In the terms used by this particular narrative, there is nothing at all to choose between them.²⁴

Although this woeful state of affairs clearly troubles him, Rich makes certain to reassure his readers, implicitly, that it was not always the case. The touch of nostalgia evident in his reference to 'women suiters in these dayes' gestures backwards to the beginning of his text, sharply delineating the antics of these 'cattle' from the pleading strategies of women who existed in a now lost golden age. From the outset, this latter group of women — famed for their skill in public speaking — have been presented rather as shining examples of their sex than as objects of castigation. Far from being instructed to avoid them (as one might be told to resist the allurements of 'common Curtizans') Rich's reader is actively encouraged to delve into *these* women's histories. 'If we should look into a vertuous life', he hypothesises, 'who more famed than *Aemelia*, *Claudia*, *Tusia*, *Nicaulia*? ... for rethoricke *Hilernia*; for oratory *Cornelia*, for eloquence *Hortensia*?' (3). Yet even the most obedient reader is obliged at this point to extend his search beyond the boundaries of this volume. For details of what these unusual women actually did or said he must 'look' elsewhere, for Rich has effectively finished with them. *The Excellency of Good Women* merely provides a catalogue of personal pronouns: here, Hilernia, Cornelia and Hortensia function more as suggestions for further reading than as protagonists in Rich's discourse. And since they are never heard to practise 'rethoricke', 'oratory' or 'eloquence', the difference between the persuasive techniques used by these women, and those

²³ *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, trans. and ed. Albert Rabil, Jr. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 84.

²⁴ According to Patricia Parker, 'the clear link that would keep women from learning rhetoric as specifically public speech is the long association in which a "public woman," and especially one

used by the similarly silent Curtizan pleader, is left for the reader to decipher, as best he may.

'Feminine Disputants' receive a similarly lukewarm reception in Richard Brathwait's *Ar't Asleepe Husband?*, where their greatest error — 'to *flow* in words, but *droppe* in matter' — is quickly pointed out. 'Copiously shall you find them worded', he continues, 'but for matter penuriously stored'. 'Howbeit', he adds, generously, 'their very presence ever accompanies their discourse with an applausive grace'.²⁵

Brathwait's emphasis on women's 'very presence' continues throughout his text. In fact, he seems singularly unable to separate women's discourse from the manner of its delivery, with the emphasis falling decisively on the latter. The rhetorical figure *philophronesis* (literally *kind treatment* in Greek) or 'the attempt to mitigate anger by gentle speech and humble submission' is at a premium in Brathwait's scheme.²⁶ 'Gentleness of speech', he explains:

is an affable treaty or conference one with another, or a winning kinde of Rhetorick, which of all others, purchaseth most friends with least cost. An excellent grace it gives to Hospitality: especially, where a cheerefull countenance is delivered with the mouth: and an entertaining eye becomes ready to usher in that speech (102).

Being confronted with an account so dominated by talk of 'friends', 'hospitality', 'welcome' and 'entertaining', makes one suspect that what Brathwait is really doing is imagining his perfect hostess, whose pleasing persona will 'usher in' her husband's guests, as well as her own speech.²⁷ It is also clear, however, that Brathwait does not distinguish between, on the one hand, the 'winning kinde of Rhetorick' used in the 'affable treaty' of civil conversation,

who spoke in public, could only be called a whore'. See her *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 103-7, at p. 104.

²⁵ Richard Brathwait, *Ar't Asleepe Husband?: A Boulster Lecture* (London, 1640), p. 70.

²⁶ The classification and definition does not appear in Brathwait. See Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd edn. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991), p. 115.

²⁷ Brathwait's ideal woman would not have found favour with George Chapman, whose own 'Good Woman' 'Affects no news, no tales, no guests, no jests'. See Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed., *The Works of George Chapman: Poems and Minor Translations* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), pp. 151-2.

and on the other, the kind used when the stakes are considerably higher. 'Nor is it almost credible what excellent fruits, this *Gentle speech* graced with a *pleasing presence* have produced both in affaires of peace and warre' (104), he declares, as if paving the way for a movement from this picture of domestic sociability to one of more stately, perhaps 'Roman Matronly', proportions. But where Heywood had called upon the witnesses more customarily gathered to prove the efficacy of female speech in matters of state-craft (Volumnia being the most obvious example), Brathwait introduces 'that princely *Sophonisba*, whose 'attractive Majesty' and 'unaffected Eloquence' proves 'that a sweet and debonair speech works wondrous effects' (105). Effects so 'wondrous', apparently, that they beggar all description: Sophonisba never utters a word.

Recalled some seventy pages later, the worthy lady has more to say for herself. Appearing this time in the category of 'Prudence' she comes into her own. 'What *wisdome* that excellent *Sophonisba* manifested to the world in the discreet carriage of her affaires' (174), Brathwait eulogises, magnanimously handing the reins over to Sophonisba herself. Startling the reader with its material incongruity, the next page is dominated by a left-hand column of quotation marks that instruct him to hear in what follows the 'authentic' voice of Sophonisba. But before she has ever opened her mouth, Brathwait has set about contradicting his own claims regarding this woman's propensity for 'soft speech'.

The anecdote he chooses describes Sophonisba's customary reaction to any 'Counsellor or Conscript Father' who 'seemed troubled', or 'shewed the least irresolution'. When this occurred, he says, 'she would usually interpose herself: and chide their weakness in this manner':

Is it fit, grave Fathers, that your advice should be to seeke,
when the state is ready to sinke? Will dejected spirits cure
our distempers? Must Fathers turne Children, and put
finger in th' eye, when imminency of perill menaceth the
States ruine? (175).

With its aggressive stacking of rhetorical questions, and its condemnation of the preposterous and unseemly passivity shown by important men, Sophonisba's speech savours more of Lady Macbeth's incitement of her husband to murderous

deeds than it does of the *philophronesis* in which she was allegedly so expert.²⁸ By allowing Sophonisba an encore, Brathwait undoes his approval by suggesting that she only exemplifies 'soft speech' for as long as she says nothing at all. His lofty pillar of quotation marks provides material evidence of Sophonisba's 'real' compulsion to 'chide'.

In many respects typical, *Ar't Asleepe Husband?* ought not, perhaps, to be read in the same terms as certain other texts in the 'praise of women' oeuvre. It might be better described, in Elizabeth Harvey's terms, as a 'ventriloquization': 'an appropriation of the feminine voice' that 'reflects and contributes to a larger cultural silencing of women'.²⁹ In this text (handsomely fronted by a picture of a rambunctious looking woman in a mobcap), Brathwait chooses not to adopt the blatantly masculine speaking voice apparent in texts such as John Taylor's *Juniper Lecture* (1639), or Thomas Heywood's *Curtaine Lecture* (1637), both of which are quite clearly written by *and for men*.³⁰ Here, the process of incrimination is more subtle. Like Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, Brathwait's narrative is supposed to be 'spoken' by a woman, and its subtitle, *A Boulster Lecture*, acts to steel the reader for a deeply prejudicial account. That this unrelenting torturer, a ready stash of examples to her credit, seems bent on selecting ones that undermine her own argument for early modern 'maistrie' is, of course, part of the joke. This discourse on female excellence is served up as a case of special pleading at best; at worst, it might easily be read as an exercise in nocturnal nagging, and an extremely prolonged one at that. *Ar't Asleepe*

²⁸ With its emphasis on 'fitness' and its derisory attitude to the idea of a voluntary regression from manliness, Sophonisba's speech employs many of the same tropes as Lady Macbeth uses to persuade her husband to commit regicide. Informed by Macbeth of his own 'irresolution', she also 'chides his weakness': 'What beast was't then, / That made you break this enterprise to me? / When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place, / Did then adhere, and yet you would make both: They have made themselves, and that their fitness now / Does unmake you'. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, rpt. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.7.47-54. That Duncan himself has, only moments earlier, been careful in his observance of gratitude to his 'Fair and noble hostess' (1.6.24) is one of the play's biggest ironies, and is especially intriguing in this context.

²⁹ Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 12.

³⁰ In the 'Epistle to the Reader', for example, Heywood extends his sympathy to the husband who has 'been often terrified with his *Curtaine clamours*' (sig. A3v).

Husband? consists of hundreds of pages of harping on daughters, the very form of which seems designed to demonstrate, by example, the utter folly of allowing women to argue their own cases.³¹ In the words of a 'Satyrst' cited in Daniel Tuvil's *Asylum Veneris*: 'Brawles chidings, jarres, attend the marriage bed; / And where a Wife lies, seldome sleepes the Head'.³²

The sincerity of Brathwait's praise leaves much to be desired, but his presentation of women famed for their achievements in oratory and state-craft has one important affinity with those of more earnest panegyrists. Far from reinforcing Quintilian's insistence that a pleader bring to his appeals all 'the fire, that voice, look, and the whole comportment of the body can give them', early modern commentaries on eminent women prefer to stress their decorous ability to *moderate* their own emotions. Evidence for this appears in a text published at the very end of the sixteenth century, *A Womans Woorth*, whose author begins by sharing his conviction 'that by the histories of many women, every man whatsoever may perfectly perceyve, that the gifts and graces of women are infinite'.³³ Like Brathwait, this author is candid about his bias towards female 'graces', which does not bode well for the reader in search of eminent female orators. In spite of its unpromising opening, however, the text proceeds to relegate the usual favourite topics of women's chastity,³⁴ religious piety,

³¹ This corresponds quite interestingly with Simon Pembroke's theories on the plethora of stories (retold frequently by early modern travel writers and anthropologists) about societies organised and run by women. According to Pembroke, there is 'no evidence whatever for the existence of matriarchal societies in the ancient world, and the myths about Amazon societies that have come down to us were originally designed to indicate how bad things could be when women got the upper hand'. Cited in Mary R. Lefkowitz, 'Influential Women', in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt, eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 49 (italics mine). A slightly different view is proffered by Simon Shepherd, who claims that the 'Elizabethans inherited Amazons from classical authors and travel books' and, whereas the latter tend to portray them as 'harmless exotic curios', the 'Amazons of classical authors tend to be glorious figures'. See his *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 13 and *passim*.

³² *Asylum Veneris, or a Sanctuary for Ladies* (London, 1616), p. 76.

³³ Anthony Gibson, *A Womans Woorth, Defended Against All the Men in the World* (London, 1599), 'The Epistle to the Ladies'.

³⁴ Genevieve Lloyd expresses the commonplace rather neatly, claiming that this period placed 'an emphasis on different virtues especially chastity, which was, for women, the central virtue around which all others revolved. Works on education for women at this time often focus on chastity as the principal justification for bothering with the education of women at all'. See 'The Man of Reason', in Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, eds., *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 113.

continence, and beauty to a place behind the 'efficacie' of the 'vertue feminine' (4) in the 'exercise of state affairs and occasions of war' (8). Her outstanding contribution to the field of 'state affairs' earns a mention for 'the mother of Coriolanus', for one, whose skill in saving Rome is attributed to a fortuitous application of 'so manie great maximes of and for the state' (6).

It is unusual for a male author to admit so ungrudgingly that a woman could speak persuasively and effectively (using 'great maximes', for example) on matters usually reserved for men. But what might, on one hand, be enjoyed as rare praise for Volumnia's rhetorical prowess has, on the other, the effect of making her virtuoso performance seem rather dry, a little cold, vaguely 'academic'. No commentator familiar with the Coriolanus story could have been ignorant of the indisputably 'emotional' nature of Volumnia's appeal to her son. Yet Gibson deliberately ignores this aspect of her plea, sweeping it aside along with the 'fire' Quintilian considered so essential a part of such petitions.

To suggest as much sounds like a complaint about the lack of human interest in *A Womans Woorth*. But this would be an unfair criticism indeed, for Gibson is clearly keen to awe his readers by showing how well 'Rhea knew ... to temper the prodigious crueltie and tyranny of *Saturne*, who not onely would disinherit her sonnes, but devoure them' (6v).³⁵ This sensational tale of savagery immediately follows another, equally shocking one. This time it is the Romans who, when 'surprized by the Sabines', 'were warrented from death and utter destruction of their Cittie, by the meanes of women, who knew how to quenche the anger justly enflamed in their fathers against their husbands' (5v). Bearing the strengths of these women in mind helps explain why, some fifteen pages later, Gibson rebukes himself for 'forget[ting] Oratours', and goes on to make 'Nature' his proof that 'women are or may be the most eloquent':

considering the organes and instruments of theyr voyce is
more mylde and gentle, than those in men, whose
pronounciation is very rough, sharpe and coorsely shapte,

³⁵ We might compare this to the very pedestrian account of Rhea given in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women*, trans. Guido A. Guarino (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964). According to Guarino, Boccaccio makes 'little or no effort to give this biography distinction of style or bring the tragic figure of Rhea to life' (xxi).

by reason of the abundance of choller, which (with their words) drives foorth so much vehemencie of spirit (20r-v).

Reluctant to let mere examples prove his case, Gibson offers a more compelling reason for why readers should accept his defence of female eloquence. Grounding his theory in biological necessity, Gibson lends 'scientific' weight to the ideological imperative which frowned upon feisty women. Implicated in this project is the idea that women are not so much disinclined to 'vehemencie' as they are physically incapable of achieving it. The appeals these women make, therefore, are never fiery; they are discreet, temperate, and softly spoken. Their oratorical successes are born out of their ability to 'temper' and 'quench' their listeners' boiling blood, not to 'enflame' an already disaffected audience. Finding herself in the thick of such disputes, the female pleader is clearly required to imagine herself as extinguisher, not kindling. And what is more, these eloquent women of antiquity are presented in this way consistently, even if to do so demands a judicious and largely silent correction of source material by their early modern male 'biographers'.

One such canny handling of a classical account occurs in John Shirley's *Illustrious History of Women*. In a chapter entitled 'Of Learning', Shirley plunges in boldly by asserting how 'In Oratory women have been found skilful Proficients, as appears in many Examples'.³⁶ This supposed embarrassment of riches yields only two gems in Shirley's account: Amasia and Hortensia, neither of whom is proficient enough, apparently, to have won herself the right to speak in her 'own' words. Ostensibly, there is nothing remarkable in this. As Mary Lefkowitz has argued, 'references to women by biographers and historians tend to be anecdotal, and so not necessarily pinned down to particular times or events'.³⁷ It is a commonplace, in other words, that male-authored historiography leaves us almost no record of female speech (hence the familiar complaint from feminists that 'history' is 'his-story'). This particular exclusion of the female voice from the *Illustrious History* is made more significant, however, by the fact that, in choosing to write about Hortensia, Shirley was dealing with the exception

³⁶ John Shirley, *An Illustrious History of Women* (London, 1686), p. 76.

³⁷ Lefkowitz, 'Influential Women', p. 55.

to the rule. And he would have known it. His omission seems doubly interesting when we discover that Valerius Maximus, the writer whom Shirley credits as the source of his account of Amasia, *had* given directions to the particular location in *The Civil Wars* at which Appian had 'recorded' Hortensia's famous speech verbatim. In short, if Shirley had really wanted to include Hortensia's 'voice', he would have known exactly where to find it.

We will return to Shirley's Hortensia shortly, but will look first (since she appears first in his text) at the classical template from which he formed Amasia. Of this Roman woman Valerius Maximus had written:

Amasia Sentia, being guilty, before a great concourse of people, pleaded her own cause. [*Lucius*] *Titus*, the Praetor then sitting in Court; and observing all the parts and elegancies of a true Defense, not onley diligently but stoutly was quitted in her first Action by the Sentences of all. And because that under the shape of a woman she carried a manly resolution, they call her *Androgyne*.³⁸

Armed with these raw materials, the author of the *Illustrious History* set about painting *his* portrait of 'Amasia, a virtuous Roman Lady', who,

being accused of a Crime, and ready to undergo the Sentence of the Praetor, she in the midst of a great confluence of People, step'd up and pleaded her own cause so effectually, and with such Eloquence, that by the publique suffrage, she was Acquitted of the Aspersion Layd to her charge, and in that great Affair, used such Decency and Modesty, that she got her self thereby the Sir-name *Androgyne*.³⁹

Shirley, apparently, was no stickler for literal translation. The description of the Praetor and the swelling crowd are common to both accounts; their difference lies in the apparent gulf between the ancient and early modern understanding of the kind of behaviour constitutive of 'Androgyny'. As Valerius Maximus has it, Amasia is called Androgyne because she carries 'under the

³⁸ Quintus Valerius Maximus, *His Collection of the Most Memorable Acts and Sayings of Orators* (London, 1684), 8.3.2.

³⁹ Shirley, *Illustrious History*, p. 76.

shape of a woman' a 'manly resolution'. From the Greek for *man* + *woman*, *androgyny* is not a word, presumably, whose etymological origins would have left Shirley baffled. And yet he seems peculiarly anxious to protect his Amasia from anything that looks even vaguely like a man: she is a 'virtuous Roman Lady', whose androgyny is inexplicably related to her capacity for exhibiting 'Decency and Modesty'.

It would be no small understatement to say that this particular reading of Amasia's 'androgyny' relies on a very generous interpretation of the term. The publication of texts such as the infamous *Hic Mulier* made the 'androgyny' an instantly recognisable figure in the early modern period, and one more likely to receive censure than praise. As Phyllis Rackin observes, 'in life as on the stage, masculine women were regarded as whores'.⁴⁰ At the centre of the anti-feminist debate, *Hic Mulier* advertises itself as a medicine to cure the 'Coltish disease of the Staggers in the Masculine-Feminines of our times'. Exhorting virtuous women to protect themselves by the clothing they wear, its author urges them to 'shield [their charms] with modest and comely garments ... that no unchaste eye may come neere to assaile them'. The mannish women who are the subject of his declamation, on the other hand, are accused of having 'cast off the ornaments of [their] sexes to put on the garments of Shame' and of laying by 'the bashfulness of [their] natures to gather the impudence of Harlots'.⁴¹ Drawing on the commonplace that allied women's use of make-up with their easy virtue, Thomas Tuke described the 'painted woman' as 'both a substantive and an adjective, and yet not of the neuter gender: but a feminine as well consorting with a masculine'.⁴² Androgyny is envisaged in both texts as the antithesis of all that is 'decent' and 'modest', a fact that obviously posed serious difficulties for writers

⁴⁰ Phyllis Rackin, 'Historical Difference/Sexual Difference', in Jean R. Brink, ed., *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England* (Kirkville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1993), p. 43.

⁴¹ *Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman*, in Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, eds., *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

⁴² Thomas Tuke, *A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women* (London, 1616), p. 57.

like Shirley, whose self-imposed task it was to prove meritorious the conduct of such mannish women.

Finding sufficient material in Valerius Maximus to portray Amasia in a positive light must have tested Shirley's powers of *inventio* to the limit. He is obliged, for one thing, to ignore his classical authority's barely concealed disapproval of his subject. 'Nor must we omit those Women', Valerius Maximus had written, by way of introducing Amasia, 'whom the condition of their Sex, and the Garments of Modesty could not hinder from appearing and speaking in publike Courts of Judicature'. The implication is, of course, that the actions of such women prove them so unencumbered by the Garment of Modesty that they are literally indecent. In this respect, Shirley's representation of Amasia's oxymoronic, 'modest' androgyny, constitutes not so much a willful misreading of Valerius Maximus's text, as a complete travesty of it.

His creativity seemingly inexhaustible, Shirley moves swiftly on to Hortensia, of whom he proceeds to make a similarly new woman. As this writer's reading of Valerius Maximus would have taught him, the speech for which Hortensia achieved notoriety was praised by Quintilian and recorded later by Appian because it was a good speech 'for the image of her father's Eloquence obtained, that the greatest part of the Imposition was remitted'.⁴³ Since it is mentioned by Quintilian⁴⁴ and Valerius Maximus but 'recorded' by Appian, we must turn to the latter to recover evidence of Hortensia's 'own' eloquence.

In Book IV of the *Civil Wars*, Appian discusses the events leading up to Hortensia's famous speech. The speech was occasioned, he explains, by the triumvirs publication of an 'edict requiring 1400 of the richest women to make a valuation of their property, and to furnish for the service of the war such portion as the triumvirs should require from each'.⁴⁵ Exasperated by the imposition of this tax, the Roman women resolved to force their way into the Forum, and there,

⁴³ Cited in Cheryl Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), p. 69.

⁴⁴ *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 volumes (London: William Heinemann, 1921), I, 1.1.6.

⁴⁵ *Appian's Roman History*, trans. Horace White, 4 volumes (London: William Heinemann, 1923), IV, 4.5.32.

'through the mouth of Hortensia, whom they selected to speak', mounted an appeal to the tribunal.

Hortensia's speech is neither brief nor self-effacing. It describes how the triumvirs' war effort has deprived the women of their male relatives. It asks why women, having committed no war-time atrocities, should 'share the penalty when we did not share the guilt'. Indeed, it demands to know why women should pay taxes at all, when they have 'no part in the honours, the commands, the statecraft' which men manage and wrangle over themselves. Significantly, the speech preempts male objections to the women's refusal to pay taxes by citing the precedent of their 'mothers', who had once made a donation to a war effort, but who did so voluntarily, not 'under fear of informers and accusers'. Another set of precedents, this time of rulers (however despotic) who had *not* imposed taxes, marks the climax of Hortensia's oration (4.5.32-3).

In her analysis of Hortensia's speech, the feminist scholar Cheryl Glenn examines several of the features that might have caught Quintilian's approving attention. One of the speech's main strengths, she claims, is its effective handling of the rhetorical question. In addition to this, Hortensia supports her case by referring to specific legal precedents, but she also echoes the anti-war arguments of Greek literary women, and makes positive use of the timelessness of the no-taxation-without-representation trope. Taken as a whole, 'the stepwise logic and cogency of Hortensia's argument' are, in Glenn's opinion, 'perhaps the most compelling (and traditionally masculine) features of her speech'.⁴⁶

This twentieth-century feminist reading of the 'traditionally masculine' features of Hortensia's speech might be productively compared to the one given by Shirley. His praise of this feminine 'mouthpiece' is, ostensibly, singularly ungrudging. 'Hortensia', he enthuses, 'the Daughter of Queen Hortensius',

when the *Roman* Matrons had a large fine imposed on them by the Tribunes, and the Lawyers fearful to undertake her cause, she as the Advocate of her Sex, boldly pleaded it before the Triumvirate, with such chearfulness and success, that the greatest part of the Imposition was remitted (77).

⁴⁶ Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold*, p. 69.

Having culled this last piece of 'factual' information straight from Valerius Maximus, Shirley's evident pleasure in his subject spurs him into permitting himself a little poetic licence: 'So that 'tis plain', he continues, 'the greatest use oth' Tongue / Which to the fair Inchanting Sex belong, / Is not to schold, as Black Detractors sung' (77). And with this playful rejoinder to his more misogynistically inclined predecessors, Shirley moves on.

This panegyrist's decision to ignore Appian's more detailed description of Hortensia's oratorical prowess (as signposted in Valerius Maximus) may speak of nothing other than the material conditions of his text's production. Perhaps Shirley owned a copy of Valerius Maximus and not one of Appian. Guesses may be hazarded, of course, but the real reason for Shirley's exclusion of Amasia's 'voice' from the *Illustrious History* must sadly remain unknown to us. Less mysterious are the effects of its omission, one of which is that it enables Shirley to present a rather less controversial female worthy. As is made perfectly clear in Appian's account, the Hortensia who approaches the tribunes is not in the best of tempers. Justifiably so. She and the other women feel themselves attacked from all sides: threatened by the imposition of a debilitating tax *and* shunned by one of their own number, Fulvia, whose response to their call for support was to repulse the women from her door, 'with a rudeness they could scarce endure'. Still smarting from this dual humiliation, Hortensia enters the Forum to protest against the overwhelming unfairness of the proposed taxation. If she stops short of calling the men there assembled murderers ('You have already deprived us of our fathers, our sons, our husbands'), bullies ('under fear of informers or accusers ...') and tyrants ('Neither Marius nor Cinna imposed taxes upon us. Nor did Sulla, who held despotic power in the state'), it is only barely so. Appian's Hortensia is a woman on the war-path.

The most cursory reading of this passage in Appian makes it hard to see how Shirley could have constructed from this oration an image of Hortensia's 'cheerfulness'. And since the word is not used by Valerius Maximus either, this sprightly, amenable Hortensia is revealed to be very much a product of Shirley's own imagination. Around this speaker is erected a *cordon sanitaire*, safeguarding her from the taint of any association with death or brutality.

Because he lets nothing that carries even a whisper of defamatory speech pass her lips, Shirley's virtuous, *silent* Roman lady can remain simply 'fair' and 'enchanted'. His commendatory snatch of verse, moreover, with its indulgent and inevitably deflating rhyme, underwrites the primarily decorative achievements of this female pleader. In the hands of both Appian and Valerius Maximus, Hortensia is referred to, specifically, as her *father's* daughter (her father, of course, being the renowned orator Hortensius). Revamping her for the seventeenth century, Shirley stresses her matrilineage, and presents her as a woman whose most admirable qualities are that she is attractive and happy. This woman, to whom the practice of 'scholding' is so alien, resembles no-one so much as Richard Brathwait's soft speaker, whose 'winning kinde of Rhetorick' is figured as an ability to excel in situations 'where a welcome accompanied with a *cheereful* countenance is delivered with the mouth'.⁴⁷ And her appearance in this role would naturally involve her calling upon skills learned at maternal, not paternal, hands. Who else but a mother, asked Christopher Newstead in 1620, is biologically inclined to 'suckle our mindes with the milke of good manners'?⁴⁸

Whether he meant it to or not, Shirley's appropriation of classical sources works to translate the successful female pleaders of antiquity into desirable Renaissance women. Amasia's and Hortensia's possession of the qualities of 'modesty', 'decency' and 'cheerfulness' are privileged (or invented if they seem not to exist) in the interests of presenting suitably decorous figures fit for female emulation. These are the qualities, of course, which pervade seventeenth-century discourses dedicated to promoting proper feminine conduct. From the classical descriptions of female uniqueness they construct a figure of the 'pleading' or 'suppliant' woman that has more in common with the behaviour expected of *all* well-brought up early modern women.

Thus, the seventeenth-century manufacture of 'illustrious women' demands that they seem to set an ideal standard. Unsurprisingly, the actions of these renowned female *speech-makers* obey exhortations in male-authored

⁴⁷ Brathwait, *Ar't Asleepe Husband?*, p. 102.

⁴⁸ Christopher Newstead, *An Apology for Women; or, Womens Defence* (London, 1620), p. 50.

conduct manuals to 'Let the carriage and behaviour be modest'.⁴⁹ Or, in the words of another concerned counsellor, 'For your Carriage, in the general, let it be a Medium'.⁵⁰ These prototypical deportment lessons teach the 'Young Gentlewoman' how 'to Manage her Gate and Gesture' — to ensure always that the gesture of the body is 'seemly and commendable'; never to 'run or go extream fast in places of Concourse ... for in such violent motions it is not always in your power to keep your Body steady' (201). A matching steadiness in speech is duly recommended. The youthful woman is warned never to 'strain your words to a pitch of Eloquence ... but let a moderate flourish suffice'. And the axiom by which to live (by now assuming the quality of a catechism), that 'Modesty and Moderation is [a woman's] Ornament, and are in themselves a moving Rhetorick' (204).

So what exactly is happening here? The first thing to notice is how effectively writers like Shirley elide the potentially threatening 'boldness' of Amasia or Hortensia's *speeches*, making the eloquent pleas themselves the mere vehicles for an exhibition of female comeliness. Thus lifted from the Roman Forum we are deposited in the English gentleman's household. Here, an attitude of supplication is not assumed to plead for a rebate in taxes. Instead, it acts as an index of proper female subservience, cleverly situating the woman firmly in her place as dutiful wife or daughter. It comes as no shock to discover how well Shirley's Amasia and his Hortensia seem to have retroactively assimilated the advice he dispenses to less famous women in the second part of *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities*, wherein are found explicit directives for behaviour relating to 'the Female sex, on all occasions'. 'In all your undertakings let it be observed that you are an enemy to Sloth', he suggests, 'not only by your early rising, but by your activity':

for having neatly dressed you ... having prostrated your self
before your Maker, and refreshed you with what was
appointed, fall upon your knees before your Parents, and

⁴⁹ Samuel Torshell, *The Womans Glorie* (London, 1645), p. 113.

⁵⁰ John Shirley, *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities*, 2nd. edn. (London, 1687), p. 192.

receiving their blessing, hasten to school ... doing it with cheerfulness (189).

Shielded, presumably, by the 'modest and comely garments' which distinguish her from her masculine-feminine counterparts, this young woman supplicates before God and her parents, not before a corpus of magistrates, and cheerfully goes about her prayers and to school. In its passage from preacher to conduct manual writer, the injunction to petitioners of both sexes to pray with 'fervency' seems to have been lost. Even in her appeals to God the exemplary woman is taught to substitute a 'glowing' religious zeal for a more diluted, rosy cheerfulness. But having successfully effected Hortensia's transformation from fiery, 'masculine' orator to 'cheerful' lady, Shirley still has work to do. Perhaps he was worried that Hortensia's grim defence of her own wealth would strike few as being among the most noble of causes. At any rate, the pleader who ventured into Shirley's *Rich Closet* was guided down a different path. Instead of speaking and acting, as did Hortensia, on behalf of a group of similarly antagonistic Roman Matrons, the young gentlewoman is encouraged to channel her powers of persuasion into preventing domestic strife:

if your parents be angry with their Servants ... do you become their Mediator: And turn not, by any means, your face from the Poor; but if it be in your power, without offending your Parents, relieve them; or, as you see occasion, petition on their behalf: by which demeanor you will command Love and Reverence, and gain the character of an humble spirit (195-6).

No willing participant in civic affairs, Shirley's exemplary woman is shown in the more familiar role of intercessor in household disputes. On the face of it, Hortensia and this lady appear to have little in common, but, oddly, Shirley makes no distinction between the behaviour deemed appropriate for each. Their circumstances and motivations are certainly dissimilar; the lady pleads on behalf of 'Servants' and 'the Poor', whereas Hortensia, on the other hand, pleads for those (herself included) who will be much poorer if her entreaty fails. In particulars their scenarios are different, but where praise is lavished it is for

qualities they share. Characterised by its modesty and decency, a woman's petition will be undertaken in a spirit of cheerfulness and, most crucially of all, perhaps, will be *Sic Vos Non Vobis* — not for ourselves. Though Shirley does not mention her, the example to be avoided in this model is surely that of Fulvia, who not only 'turned' from a group of women threatened with relative poverty, but slammed her door in their faces. Considering the notorious ungraciousness of this unwilling suppliant, it is surely no accident that Shakespeare's Antony is mocked by Cleopatra for his propensity to jump when 'shrill tongu'd Fulvia scolds'. While the Egyptian's famed 'blackness' may remind us of pots and kettles here, this may be one occasion when the Queen's derision tells us more about early modern conceptions of Fulvia's failings than it does about the speaker herself.

But to argue that Shirley's incitement to modesty was an imperative applicable to female petitioners only is to distort the evidence. Theorists and practitioners from antiquity through the Renaissance privileged a pleader's ability to deliver a 'decent' oration. It is curious, in fact, that Shirley chose to emphasise the maternal branch of Hortensia's genealogy, when the very qualities he is most keen to promote were commonly reckoned to reside in her father. As Shirley's reading of Valerius Maximus would have taught him, Quintus Hortensius himself, 'thinking there was very much to be ascribed to a decent and com[e]ly motion of the Body, spent more time in practising that than in studying for Eloquence'.⁵¹ Similarly, the sub-title of John Bulwer's *Chironomia* (1644) tellingly designates the 'Naturall Gestures of the HAND' the '*Regulated Accessories or faire-spoken Adjuncts of Rhetoricall Utterance*'. *Chironomia*'s 'Praeludium' (which puns throughout with a *Titus*-like relentlessness on the theme of hands) introduces the text by asserting that '*Decencie* is properly spoken of *Gesture*':

and is so looked for at the *Hand* of an Orator, that the defects of extemporarie and jejune Orations, have been covered by the Elegancies of this Artifice; and those that have come off unhandsomly with their expressions, for

⁵¹ Cited in Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold*, p. 191n.50.

want of these comely and palliating graces of Elocution,
were ever laughed at, and justly derided.⁵²

What is new here is Bulwer's introduction of the threat of humiliation into the context of an oration — the means of avoiding it, by judicious use of 'regulated', decent and comely gestures, is standard.⁵³ Even Shakespeare's Henry V, formerly the outrageously indecorous Prince Hal, is aware of the propriety of using such gestures in certain circumstances. Unless one counts his advances to Katherine, of course, there is no point in this play at which Hal assumes the role of the suppliant petitioner. Still, on the eve of the battle of Agincourt he is responsible, nonetheless, for persuading a reluctant body of men to undertake a course of action unlikely to be particularly advantageous to themselves. Treating his soldiers to a little touch of Harry in the night does not involve him subjecting them to a fiery or impassioned oration. On the contrary, as he works the crowd, the King's solicitations bear more resemblance to the 'winning Rhetorick' served up by Brathwait's gentle speaker. Indeed, the Chorus speaks fondly of how Hal bids the soldiers

... good morrow with a modest smile,
And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.
... Nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour
Unto the weary and all-watched night,
But freshly looks and overbears attaint
With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty.⁵⁴

Shakespeare's description of a male sovereign who, whatever else his failings, is seldom accused of effeminacy or sexual emasculation is replete with the same language of modesty and cheerfulness as pervades prescriptive conduct

⁵² John Bulwer, *Chironomia* (London, 1644), 'The Praeludium'.

⁵³ The point made by William Miller about the possible link between 'decent' behaviour and the ability to ward off humiliation is interesting in this context. 'As long as their humility doesn't descend to the morbidity of obsessively and perversely undervaluing their virtues', he claims, humble people 'have a near airtight defence against being humiliated and, for the most part, against feeling humiliated too'. John Bulwer is not necessarily stressing the 'humility' inherent in 'comely and palliating graces', but Miller's comment does draw together the advice given to orators by Bulwer and that given to the Shirley's 'humble spirited' young lady in quite a revealing way. See William Ian Miller, *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 148.

⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. T.W. Craik (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 4.0.33-40.

manuals like Shirley's.⁵⁵ In similar terms did James I instruct his own son, another Henry, to exercise the virtue of moderation in all his dealings. 'In your language be plaine, honest, naturall, comely, cleane, short, and sententious', the King advised, 'eschew ... both the extremities', and 'let the greatest part of your eloquence consist in a naturall, cleane, and sensible forme of the deliverie of your minde', 'temper[ed] ... with gravitie, quicknesse, or merrinesse, according to the subject, and occasion of the time'.⁵⁶ Reading both Shakespeare's and James's descriptions of masculine exemplarity against that of Brathwait's ideal woman should therefore alert us to something important. One of the effects of this comparison is to help release women from at least one element of the double-standard with which we automatically assume they lived. In short, when writers such as Brathwait praise Tomyris's skill in 'composing or moderating ... her owne affections' (171), when they commend the 'moderation and discretion' with which Penthesilea bore her losses (174), or the 'wonderfull discretion and moderation' displayed by Queen Amalasunta,⁵⁷ they are not necessarily gendering this behaviour female.

In the light of such evidence it would be rash to claim that male pleaders were exempt from observing the rules governing an orator's 'comely' delivery of his case. What I do believe is that the principles of 'modesty' and 'moderation' were more than a set of characteristics necessarily possessed by the woman who

⁵⁵ For an account that figures Henry's sexuality as more ambiguous see Richard Corum, 'Henry's Desires', in Louise Fradenberg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Mobilising 'Queer' reading strategies, Corum reads this scene as demonstrative of Hal's 'longing for illicit male companionship' (87), and implies that the King is what *today's* reader would call a homosexual. A more complex treatment of the same subject is offered by Jonathan Goldberg in *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). Unlike Corum, Goldberg does not forget that premodern sexualities cannot be classified in terms equivalent to our own. He abandons the search for the 'sodomite' *per se*, suggesting it would be a mistake to find that Hal is 'offered up to homosexual desire' (161).

⁵⁶ In this section of *Basilicon Doron*, James advises Henry to look to his 'speaking and language', to which he joins his 'gesture, since action is one of the chiefest qualities that is required in an oratour'. Having told him to eschew 'both the extremities' in his speech, James proceeds to describe the benefits of 'us[ing] also the like forme in your gesture; neither looking sillily, like a stupide pedant; nor unsettledly, with an uncouth morgue, like a new-comeover Cavalier'. See *Basilicon Doron, or His Majesties Instructions to His Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince*, in *The Workes* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1971), pp. 183-4. A facsimile of the 1616 edition.

⁵⁷ Tuvil, *Asylum*, p. 101.

would set foot in this male-dominated profession. In the special case of female pleading, I would argue, they constitute nothing less than an entire subject position. A brief examination of the shared etymology of these words may help explain what I mean by this. The adjective 'modest' is derived directly from the Latin *modestus* — modest, moderate, in due measure, from a pre-Latin stem *medes-*; the adjective 'moderate', borrowed from Latin *moderatus*, past participle of *moderari* — to regulate, from the same pre-Latin stem. Implicit in both words, then, is the idea of 'measure' (described by Johann Sturmius as 'when in such things as doe agree, there is neyther to much nor to little'), the avoidance of extremes, more particularly of 'regulation'.⁵⁸

The early modern reader curious to know the exact definition of 'moderate' was informed by John Bullokar that it meant 'Measurable, temperate, also to governe or temper with discretion'.⁵⁹ Published in 1616, Bullokar's dictionary includes both the noun and the verb forms of the word 'moderate', the latter of which was first used in 1577 to refer to the action of 'regulating' or 'presiding' over a debate.⁶⁰ What is described here seems to correspond with our own perception of what a chairperson does — that Bullokar gives the job to 'a governor' seems not to make much difference. Yet to leave the definition here neglects the precision of his characterisation. Bullokar's 'Moderator' (as his next entry confirms) is no ordinary regulator; he is, quite specifically, a '*discreet* governor', who 'keeps both parties', as Thomas Blount also put it, 'from running into extreame'.⁶¹ Both accounts suggest that early modern subjects found it hard to separate the idea of presiding over two parties (the action of moderation) from the quality of being moderate. Clearly, the prerequisite for any 'moderator' in this period was that he himself embody the quality of 'moderation'.

⁵⁸ Sturmius, *A Riche Storehouse*, p. 50v (mispaginated as p. 44v).

⁵⁹ John Bullokar, *An English Expositor* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1967). A facsimile of the 1616 edition.

⁶⁰ See the *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh and New York: Chambers, 2000), p. 670.

⁶¹ See Blount's definition of 'Moderator', in *Glossographia* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969). A facsimile of the 1656 edition. Blount's definition is obviously borrowed with slight variation from Bullokar's description of 'he that keepeth both parties from beeing too extreame'.

Introducing into the equation one further meaning of 'moderate' — the sense that the *OED* describes as 'Of medium or middling quantity' — may help to further explain my comparison of a woman's predilection for modesty and moderation to her 'subject position'. It is this definition, with its connotations of centrality or 'in-between'-ness, rather than the sense of 'presiding over', that will be emphasised in my own reading of Shakespeare's suppliant women.

To illustrate this we must return, one final time, to a male-authored narrative that itself seems to compare two species of female petition. The examples are drawn from Thomas Heywood's *Curtaine Lecture*. Both concern women who plead on their own behalf and both of these women are 'Virgins'. Both stories supply the circumstances leading up to each woman's defence of her actions; only one is heard to defend them. Borrowed from Seneca, Heywood's first example centres around a 'Vestall Virgin', who was 'summoned into open Court, and pleaded against' for writing a verse — '*Felices nuptae, moriar nisi nubere dulce est*' — in praise of marriage.⁶² The verse alone assures the magistrates of the Virgin's flagrant pollution of her vocational integrity. For them her attempt at poetic composition can mean one of only two things: that 'she is either raptur'd with the thought of what she hath already proved, or exstasi'd with the conceit of that she hath not yet tried' (42). Reasoning further that any innocent woman who wished to write on marriage would have made 'chaste *Lucrece* her theme', they pronounce the Virgin guilty - condemning her as one who 'undoubtedly ha[s] done the act' (45).

These attacks on the Virgin's character (founded on nothing more than the existence of her poem) are never refuted, either by the Virgin herself or by Heywood. There is nothing remarkable, perhaps, in the Virgin's failure to defend herself by recourse to the *pro*-marriage arguments which any schoolboy of the period would have known. It is more significant that, although Heywood could undoubtedly have helped her, he self-consciously declines to play 'the Advocate' by 'shewing what answer she might make for herself' (45). With the Virgin disabled from offering any excuse for her conduct, Heywood takes the

⁶² Thomas Heywood, *A Curtaine Lecture* (London, 1637), p. 41.

opportunity to salvage from it a moral lesson. 'If one facetious line ... might be so traduc'd and farre stretcht ... how charie ought all Virgins to be? how carefull and cautelous in all their deportments?' (46). In the context of this cautionary tale, there is little wonder that Heywood's rudely versifying Virgin seems curiously absent from the proceedings against her.

Heywood's very next example, by contrast, gives ample air-time to a woman in the process of defending herself against a male aggressor. Against the story of the 'rude' 'Recluse', Heywood approvingly places a more exemplary narrative, designed to 'encourage all maidens how to behave themselves that they may be the better married' (48). The story itself concerns a chance encounter between Galbrata Bertha, a girl of 'extraordinaire beautie and vertue' and daughter to a private Florentine, and one Emperour Otho, visiting the city at that time on urgent business.

Participating one day in an early modern walk-about, Otho notices the beautiful Galbrata, whom he singles out from a crowd of well-wishers. Upon returning to the Duke's palace to dine, he proceeds to describe her to the assembled company, one of whom, it so happens, is the girl's father, Bellincionus. Heywood does not mention (much less dwell upon) the motives behind Bellincionus's next move, which is to summon his daughter with all speed to the palace. Galbrata obeys his command anyway, being an innocent, unsuspecting girl, and little expecting to be prostituted by her own father. Suggesting that he might like to find a more remote chamber, Bellincionus presents to the Prince 'the Virgin by him so much praised ready to prostrate herself to your Majesty' (54). Otho is evidently not repulsed by this prospect; Galbrata, on the other hand, is horrified, and proceeds to defend her own right to preserve her chastity.

So persuasive is Galbrata's petition that the amorous Otho withdraws his advances and, with a dramatic renewal of purpose, resolves to find her a worthy husband instead. Unlike the defence mounted by a certain Shakespearean virgin in similarly awkward circumstances, Galbrata's plea is an object lesson in female deference and subservience. Her first action, indeed, is to deny 'the Emperour her right hand, and with her left modestly put him back' (55). Then, apologising

to the Prince's 'high and sacred Majesty', she informs him of the vow made between her and her Saviour never to lend her hand to any but her husband. Having established that this spouse does not yet exist, Otho asks her leave to supply one. Galbrata, fully aware that to refuse would signify a 'great rudeness & indiscretion', accepts his offer (58).

Brief as they are, these synopses show why Heywood's second virgin is allowed to make answer for herself while the first virgin is not. The first girl is being rewarded for prizing her chastity above all else, the second, for holding hers too light. When measured against one ordered to defend her own 'penning' of 'trifles', Galbrata Bertha's is by far the less 'idle cause'. In addition to this, her answer is itself couched in the most pleasingly decorous of terms. Some of it is delivered from the floor, to which she has tearfully fallen 'low upon her knees' (56). And the whole petition is characterised by its 'bashfull shame, and well-becoming modesty' (56), its 'low and well-beseeming obedience' (57), and its 'discretion and modesty' (59).

A plea delivered with 'modesty'; a 'well-beseeming' carriage: the similarities between Galbrata's plea and those of the female worthies hardly needs pointing out. Distinguished by her 'meane condition and quality' from Amasia and Hortensia, Galbrata occupies exactly the same position in Heywood's discourse as these women do in Shirley's. As this writer kindly acknowledges, the 'many examples' of worthy women mean that space in which to praise them is at a premium, so that while the ability to deliver a 'modest' petition does not guarantee her admission to the ranks of successful female pleaders, its opposite certainly precludes it. However, the submissive and unthreatening nature of Galbrata's petition is not the only reason we are allowed to hear it. Another reason has less to do with the petition itself than with its eventual outcome.

Stripped of its local colour, Heywood's story is simple: a man prostitutes his daughter, who makes an eloquent plea which succeeds in persuading a second, more powerful, man to alter his intended course of action. The girl is then offered in marriage to a third man, himself under the patronage of the second. The story ends happily enough but several of its features are curious.

Although Heywood initially makes much of Bellincionus's 'base Pandarisme', all censure for his conduct in the affair is, as the narrative progresses, effectively overshadowed by Otho's magnanimity in bestowing Galbrata on a gentleman 'whom hee much favoured' (59). Immediately the Prince assumes control, in fact, the Florentine pimp drops out of the narrative altogether. Accompanied by a change in the story's structure of authority, this shift may be read in almost graphic terms. The story begins with a tableau in which Bellincionus played the bawd, going-between Galbrata and Otho; it ends with Otho decisively rejecting the role of beneficiary and literally assuming that of benefactor. The lucky recipient of Otho's generosity is told how the Prince has at length 'found out a gift to reward him, and to remunerate his long and and faithfull service; such a one as might become the giver, and (withall) prove worthy his acceptance: and in the closure of these words presented unto him the Virgin Galbrata Bertha' (59-60).

The ideological implications of Heywood's story will be only too familiar to anthropologists and cultural historians interested in the ties that bind. Theories originally posited by Marcel Mauss, in his seminal *Essay on the Gift*, have subsequently been developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gayle Rubin, and Luce Irigaray.⁶³ It was Mauss who first noticed the 'significance of one of the most striking features of primitive societies: the extent to which giving, receiving, and reciprocating gifts dominates social intercourse'.⁶⁴ The significance of gift giving (whether the gift be a dance, a shell, a pig, or a spell) is that it expresses, affirms, or creates a link between the partners in an exchange. In this primitive context, Mauss claimed, gifts were the threads of social intercourse by which societies were held together in the absence of specialised governmental institutions. Lévi-Strauss's contribution to this theory of social organisation took

⁶³ See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1969); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer, ed. Rodney Needham, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine', in Margaret Whitford, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 118-32.

⁶⁴ Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex', in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Towards an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 171.

the form of a radical gloss on Mauss's idea of primitive reciprocity. He argued that marriages are the most basic form of gift exchange, in which it is women who are the most precious of gifts.⁶⁵ Precious, perhaps, but, as Gayle Rubin has adroitly observed:

if it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it ... And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage (174).

Rubin describes this process quite simply as 'the traffic in women'.

The centrality of this schema to kinship systems is indisputable. A twenty-first century bride who walks up an aisle in a white dress is still fairly likely to be 'given away' by her father (or some equivalent male relative). This tradition makes Otho's attitude to his 'gift' and himself as 'giver' seem rather less draconian, and only marginally more embarrassingly compliant with Lévi-Strauss's model. This much is obvious; less clear is the precise significance of Galbrata's petition in this context. Can the matter of female pleading be legitimately read in the light of such theories of social organisation? I think it can. In one of the most recent appropriations of Lévi-Strauss, Eve Sedgwick shifts his parameters in order to explain the importance to patriarchal cultures of what she terms male 'homosexuality': social bonds between persons of the same sex.⁶⁶ The ingenuity of Sedgwick's reading lies in its conflation of Lévi-Strauss's theories with those espoused by another French critic, René Girard, in his *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. In this text, Sedgwick explains, 'Girard traced a calculus of power that was structured by the relation of rivalry between the two active members of an erotic triangle' (21).

The affinity between Girard's insistence on the bond connecting two 'active' rivals, and Lévi-Strauss's on that binding the (male) partners in a

⁶⁵ 'What, will you not suffer me?', the furious Kate asks her father, Baptista Minola, 'Nay, now I see / She is your treasure, she must have a husband' (2.1.31-2).

⁶⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 1.

marriage exchange, is not far to seek. But what Sedgwick does is detach this graphic schema from the specific field of *conjugal* relations — a move that enables her to talk more generally about ‘the special relationship between male homosocial ... desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power’ (25). Put simply, Sedgwick’s thesis is encapsulated in the title of her text: in patriarchal societies the lines of power run *between men*. And they are fostered and kept open by the presence of a less powerful third party (usually a woman) who occupies a position *between men*. Sedgwick’s more permissive take on the ubiquity of this paradigm for *all* power transactions thus provides the basis for my own reading of Shakespeare’s suppliant women.

Made manifest in Shakespeare’s work as a graphic schema that is reproduced time and again in his representation of women petitioners, there are several reasons why Sedgwick’s ‘between men’ paradigm is peculiarly relevant to the context of female pleading. One of the most obvious has its roots in classical proscriptions against female participation in civic affairs. In an analysis which inscribes another black mark against the name of Fulvia, Sarah Pomeroy compares the political manoeuvrings of this woman, Marc Antony’s ambitious first wife, with those practised by Octavia, his second:

While Fulvia’s policy had been to steer Antony against Octavian, Octavia’s was to mediate between the two men, and for her efforts she won the approbation of her brother and later historians. Her precedents for female intercession between factions of men were, of course, the legendary women of the early Republic, including the Sabine women and the delegation of women that dissuaded Coriolanus from attacking Rome.⁶⁷

Assuming the task of ‘going-between’ men in this way, Pomeroy insists, ‘was the only traditionally commendable, active political role for women in Rome’ (186). Nevertheless, admitting that there was a classical provenance for female intercession still does not fully explain why the ‘between men’ paradigm seems so essential and recurrent a feature of female pleading scenes. Providing a

⁶⁷ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1994), p. 186.

plausible explanation for it is harder than showing that it invariably *was* the case. Consider the evidence provided by the male-authored texts examined in this chapter. Speaking broadly, early modern attitudes to female pleaders may be summarised thus: 'feminine disputants' were viewed with suspicion, but the 'worthiness' of the case and, more crucially, *for* and *to whom* that case was being pleaded, were decisive factors governing the degree of censure a female pleader could expect to receive for her trouble. Women who fought their own corners inevitably fared worst, as is shown by the gleeful alacrity with which Thomas Heywood takes up Juvenal's example of Manilia: 'a bold-fac't Roman Matron, who being full of controversie, and through her wrangling having many suits in agitation, blusht not in open Court to bee her owne Advocate, and plead her owne causes in publike assemblies'.⁶⁸

Less typical (and perhaps more significant because less overtly misogynist) are male attitudes to women who plead on behalf of other women — not because they are treated especially harshly but because they are scarcely mentioned at all. Hortensia's petition on behalf of the Roman matrons is anomalous in this respect; more commonly, narratives of women promoting the interests of women tend to be removed from the category of 'skill in oratory', say, and appropriated as evidence of quite different feminine traits.

The table of contents in Brathwait's *Ar't Asleepe Husband?*, for example, promises to relay the tale of 'a Finitive Girle desirous to excuse her lady'. We as readers, the legatees of stories in which loyal women like Shakespeare's Emilia or his Paulina would defend their mistresses even unto death, may reasonably expect much from this 'Girle'. In the event, all she is called upon to excuse is her employer's lateness in receiving a gentleman caller, and, in what seems to be Heywood's only discernible motive for telling the tale, to show how she is unable (without making an ignorant malapropism) to do even that. Before too long, as we have seen already, Brathwait will praise the 'worthy' Sophonisba for her efforts with the recalcitrant grave fathers. More interesting in this context is what

⁶⁸ In *A Curtaine Lecture*, Heywood quotes Juvenal's contention that 'There is no cause in Court, nor act in State, / From which a woman cannot ground debate' by way of introducing a section of text demonstrative 'Of [women's] wrangling and litigiousnesse' (10-11).

comes *after* his plaudits of this kind of rhetorical aptitude. His next section commends women active in the promotion of 'JUSTICE', included amongst whom is a woman Heywood is pleased to recognise for her unerring refusal to defend her own daughter. When it comes to mounting a petition, the woman who would 'usually interpose herself' between men is accepted, the woman who speaks on her own behalf is not, and the third alternative — the woman who takes another woman's part — is so little countenanced that she seems, ironically, to wriggle out from under the net of male judgment and evaporate, harmlessly, away.

So why exactly should examples of this kind of female pleader prove so hard to come by? The answer must surely lie in what is at stake in these scenarios. A woman who makes a successful petition to a man, either for herself or on another woman's behalf, effectively alters the balance of power between them. For while the power to grant that request may remain a male prerogative, the successful female pleader has indisputably proved her own capacity for changing a male mind. This is a frightening prospect, and one to be avoided at all costs. As Sedgwick remarks in relation to the homosocial triangles that are the subject of her book:

for a man to undergo even a humiliating change in the course of a relationship with a man still feels like preserving or participating in a sum of male power, while for a man to undergo any change in the course of a relationship with a woman feels like a radical degeneration of substance (45).

Whilst I am reluctant to envisage Shakespeare warding off 'a radical degeneration of [male] substance', I do believe that his insistent insertion of women between men in female pleading scenes might be read as an effort to contain the ambiguity generated by female excuse-making strategies, made manifest, in this case, in the figure of the female petitioner.

To claim that the case of Galbrata is illustrative of early modern attitudes to female pleaders may therefore seem like a contradiction in terms. Galbrata pleads for herself and is still praised for her conduct: according to the model

outlined above she ought not to have got off so lightly. The key to this example, however, lies in its male protagonist's successful management of the outcome of this female petition. Whilst Galbrata obeys on every point the proscriptions against immodesty so harped on by male commentators, her successful petition is sufficiently anxiety-making to ensure that, by the close of Heywood's narrative, she has been safely reinstalled in a subject position 'between men'.

Heywood's representation of this persuasive woman differs from the vast majority of Shakespeare's only in its degree of subtlety. Not all Shakespeare's suppliant women are so overtly jostled into a marriage contract that serves to reinforce their status as objects (rather than agents) in an exchange. This said, the analysis of the plays to follow will show how urgently this pattern is recreated in Shakespearean drama. Examining the playwright's handling of Volumnia and Valeria in *Coriolanus*; Hermione and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*; and Isabella and Mariana in *Measure for Measure*, reveals just how often Shakespeare resorted to this paradigm. Even those women who threaten to disrupt it, by pleading on behalf of other women, invariably get coaxed back into a position of reduced agency. A position, most frequently, between men.

Shakespeare had access to two complete accounts of the classical story of Volumnia and Coriolanus, the older written by Livy, who began writing *On the Foundation of the City* around 27-25 B.C., the other in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (A.D. 104-115). It was this later source that provided Shakespeare with most of the material for his play.⁶⁹ A comparison of this text with its source suggests that one of the elements Shakespeare was most keen to preserve from the *Parallel Lives* was the centrality it accords to the relationship between Coriolanus and his widowed mother. Shakespeare took more, in fact, from Plutarch's version of the

⁶⁹ See Catherine La Courreye Blecki, 'An Intertextual Study of Volumnia: From Legend to Character in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*', in Jean R. Brink, ed., *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England* (Kirkville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1993), p. 82 and *passim*.

climactic scene between mother and son than he did from any other episode in the source.⁷⁰

One of the most important borrowings Shakespeare made from Plutarch, for our purposes at least, was the manner in which Volumnia equips herself to go and plead. Shakespeare's Volumnia does not approach her son alone — accompanying her are Valeria, Coriolanus's wife Virgilia, and his son, young Marcius. Coriolanus provides a kind of running commentary as they draw closer:

My wife comes foremost; then the honour'd mould
Wherein this trunk was fram'd, and in her hand
The grandchild to her blood.⁷¹

Although the soldier's repeated references to this entourage prove he has not missed its significance, Volumnia persists in drawing her son's attention back to her fellow suppliants. Even as he looks in torture upon the young boy whose 'aspect of intercession ... / Great nature cries, "Deny not"' (5.3.32-3), Volumnia continues to underline their presence, reminding Coriolanus, lest he forget, that 'Even he, your wife, this lady and myself / Are suitors to you' (II.77-8). Unnecessary as these reiterations seem, there is no madness in Volumnia's method. Well documented by classical orators, her strategy of presenting the 'mother, wife and child' (I.101) as an inescapable physical reality was reckoned to be an extremely effective incitement to pity. 'Actions as well as words may be employed to move the court to tears', wrote Quintilian in the *Institutio Oratoria*:

Hence the custom of bringing accused persons into court wearing squalid and unkempt attire, and of introducing their children and parents, and it is with this in view that we see blood-stained swords, fragments of bone taken from the wound, and garments spotted with blood, displayed by the accusers, wounds stripped of their dressings, and scourged bodies bared to view.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

⁷¹ William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. Philip Brockbank, rpt. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998), 5.3.22-4. All subsequent references will be to this edition, and will appear in the text.

⁷² Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1920-21), IV, 6.1.30. On Aristotle's account of the enormous psychagogic power of objects exhibited

Shakespeare's dramatisation of the part played by Coriolanus's family in Volumnia's petition has its provenance in Plutarch. In his version of the story, Volumnia 'took her daughter-in-law and Martius' children with her, and, being accompanied with all the other Roman Ladies, they went in troop together unto the Volsces' camp'.⁷³ During the course of its journey from Plutarch (via Amyot and his translator North) to Shakespeare something has clearly gone missing from this episode. The final Act of *Coriolanus* sees 'Virgilia, Volumnia, Valeria and young Martius Enter, with Attendants', but these 'Attendants' are clearly not the women of whom Plutarch speaks. So who are all Plutarch's 'Roman Ladies' and where have they gone? One of their number, Valeria, is retained by Shakespeare; what is omitted (aside from any explanation for her presence) is the significance of her role. Hardly figuring as one of Shakespeare's famed 'round' characters, Valeria had received a much fuller treatment at the hands of Plutarch.⁷⁴ 'Now the Roman ladies and gentlewomen did visit all the temples and gods of the same, to make their prayers unto them', wrote the author of the *Lives*:

But the greatest ladies, and more part of them, were continually about the altar of Jupiter Capitoline; among which troop by name was Valeria, Publicola's own sister ... His sister Valeria was greatly honoured and revered among all the Romans; and did so modestly and wisely behave herself that she did not shame nor dishonour the house she came of. So she suddenly fell into such a fancy ... Whereupon she rose and the other ladies with her, and they all together went straight to the house of Volumnia, Martius' mother ... Now all the train of these ladies sitting in a ring round about her, Valeria first began to speak in this sort to her:

'We ladies are come to visit you ladies, my lady Volumnia and Virgilia, by no direction from the Senate nor commandment of other magistrate, but through the inspiration, as I take it, of some god above; who, having

directly before the eyes of a jury, see Cathy Eden, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 15-16.

⁷³ T.J.B. Spencer, ed., *Shakespeare's Plutarch* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 352.

⁷⁴ On Valeria and the sources for this figure, see Judith Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 47-8.

taken compassion and pity on our prayers, hath moved us to come unto you, to entreat you in a matter, as well beneficial for us, as also for the whole citizans in general; but to your selves in especial ... Come on, good ladies, and let us go all together unto Martius to entreat him to take pity upon us, and also to report the troth unto him' (350-51).

Conspicuous by its absence from *Coriolanus*, its author's exclusion of this episode prompts us to ask, as Catherine La Courreye Blecki has, why Shakespeare chose to 'omit such a useful and powerful scene?' (85). The effect of this departure from source is, in her opinion, to give 'Volumnia a more profound role in the play because she becomes the spokesperson for all those who would save Rome, men and women, patrician and plebeian' (85). But Blecki's suggestion — that Volumnia's role is enhanced through Shakespeare's sacrifice of Valeria's speech — fails to notice the significance of what, precisely, he put in its place. In effect he replaced it with nothing, for (as Blecki admits) it is left to Cominius to report on the likelihood of Volumnia and Virgilia turning suppliant. Extremely unhelpful that Menenius will succeed in persuading Coriolanus where he himself has failed, Cominius tells how he 'kneel'd before' Martius:

'Twas very faintly he said "Rise", dismiss'd me
Thus, with his speechless hand ...
So that all hope is vain,
Unless his noble mother and his wife,
Who, as I hear, mean to solicit him
For mercy to his country. Therefore let's hence,
And with our fair entreaties haste them on (5.1.65-74).

This short scene takes the place of an episode to which Plutarch gave considerable space. The *Lives* had shown a group of women who make a proactive decision to plead to another group of women, who plead successfully, and who join forces and travel to the Volscians's camp, again to plead. In Shakespeare's version of the story, by contrast, we are given hints about the women's decision which echo with the vagaries of rumour, and seem only to describe ill-defined projects: Volumnia and Virgilia, Cominius 'hears', 'mean to' solicit Coriolanus. Shakespeare's departure from Plutarch also means that his

account is missing the effect of Valeria's careful emphasis on the Roman ladies' independence of decision. They are sent to plead, she assures Coriolanus's female relatives, 'by no direction from the Senate nor commandment of other magistrate'. Upon entering the camp, Plutarch's Volumnia is met by men who 'did both pity and reverence her; and there was not a man among them that once durst say a word unto her' (352). In Shakespeare, we are prepared for the same entrance of the suppliant women by a man who seems scarcely able to recount the news, so eager is he to be away to 'haste them on'. The fact that Valeria (a woman) has persuaded Volumnia (another woman) to plead with Coriolanus is thus underplayed, at the same time as the role of Cominius and Menenius as instigators of the petition is emphasised.

As inconsequential as the phrase may sound, Cominius's intention to speak with the putative suppliants and 'haste them on' is echoed elsewhere in Shakespeare. Indeed, the frequency with which this idea resurfaces, especially in the context of female pleading scenes, suggests that Cominius's words are far more significant than their throwaway quality would at first imply.

They occur again in Act II of *The Winter's Tale*, by which point Leontes seems finally to have relinquished his struggle against absolute paranoia. As his perfunctory disregard of the Oracle's verdict later proves, Leontes is determined from the first to act as judge, jury, and witnesses all in the case of Hermione's alleged adultery. Brought forward to speak on her own behalf in her husband's kangaroo court, Hermione puts to test Quintilian's assurance that 'Invocation of the gods ... usually gives the impression that the speaker is conscious of the justice of his cause'.⁷⁵ 'Your honours all, / I do refer me to the Oracle: / Apollo be my judge',⁷⁶ cries Hermione in closing — a device rendered superfluous by Leontes's power to overthrow any decision favourable to his wife. An implacable judge, hardened by hallucinatory suspicion, Leontes is invulnerable to the emotional appeals used to such effect by Shakespeare's Volumnia. As we

⁷⁵ *Institutio Oratoria*, (6.1.34). Aristotle discusses the Oracle as evidence in the *Rhetoric*, 1.15.14.

⁷⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. J.H.P. Pafford (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 3.2.113-15. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

have seen, Quintilian's contention that the 'practice ... of appealing to the judges by all that is near and dear to them will be of great service to the accused, especially if he, too, has children, a wife and parents' (6.1.33), is exploited to the full by Volumnia. The visual impact of a bowing mother, a wife, and a son who wears an aspect of intercession, makes 'melt' (5.3.28) the man who functions simultaneously as accused and judge.

Working from the same principle, *The Winter's Tale's* Paulina has rather less success. She has not reckoned, perhaps, on the strength of Leontes's loathing for the cuckoo object he considers neither near nor dear to him. Hence, the baby girl whom Hermione's woman lays before him prompts the King to issue a precipitous death sentence rather than to undergo a change of heart. Paulina's plea on behalf of 'his queen / ... His hopeful son, his babe' (2.3.84-5) meet only with threats and insults. She is attacked as a 'mankind witch' (1.67), a 'crone' (1.76), a 'callat / Of boundless tongue' (11.90-91), a 'gross hag' (1.108), a 'most intelligencing bawd' (1.68).

Leontes's anger at this point is clearly no catalyst for linguistic innovation. Enraged by Paulina's impertinence, he clutters his speech with defamatory epithets, thus seeking refuge in the commonplace which linked female loquacity to witchcraft, and sexual incontinence to both.⁷⁷ More noteworthy, perhaps, is what Leontes chooses to dwell on in this chain of associations; especially significant is his perception of Paulina as an 'intelligencing bawd'. Even when told of her clearly stated intention to go between Hermione and himself, Leontes prefers to imagine Paulina as a pander for her mistress and Polixenes. That she has come in the capacity of intercessor between husband and wife is a possibility he refuses to countenance. Instead, the King's wrath burgeons out to embrace the male witnesses to this scene of female pleading; his hysteria fixing now on Paulina, now on her husband and the other lords. The defamation of Paulina's character is thus punctuated with accusations of conspiratorial treachery among his male followers, targeted specifically at the

⁷⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. J.H.P. Pafford (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 3.2.113-15. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

⁷⁷ On the conflation of verbal and sexual incontinence see Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 101ff.

husband who 'art worthy to be hang'd, / That wilt not stay her tongue' (2.3.108-9).

In the space created by Paulina's departure, Leontes's ire comes to rest finally on Antigonus, whom the King is convinced 'hath set on thy wife to this' (1.130). Gesturing to the abandoned child, Antigonus is ordered to 'Go, take it to the fire; / For thou set'st on thy wife' (11.140-41). This Antigonus emphatically denies; that 'he is not guilty of her coming hither' (1.144) the other lords willingly confirm. So why cannot Leontes be shaken in his belief that Antigonus is behind Paulina's petition? That it is actually he who has 'been so tenderly officious / With Lady Margery, your midwife there, / To save this bastard's life' (11.158-60)? Leontes's irrationality has reached fever pitch, of course, which may be the only explanation necessary for his assiduous scapegoating of Antigonus. This said, Leontes's reluctance to envisage Paulina as an intercessor between a woman (Hermione) and a man (himself) may be significant in more than its expression of the efforts of a distracted mind to fix blame upon any convenient object. The King's propensity to recast Paulina's own plea (on behalf of mother and daughter) as one that has actually been prompted by a man is not peculiar to suspicious rulers half-crazed with jealousy. Or perhaps it is. It occurs, at any rate, in another notorious Shakespearean pleading scene, whose location this time is 'A public place near the city gates'. The city is Vienna, the suppliants Mariana and Isabella, the play *Measure for Measure*.

Before looking at what happens in these female petitions, however, it is worth noting that they have only been made possible by the success of an earlier act of female persuasion to which we as audience have not been party. This plea has, in turn, been necessitated by another petition — that of Isabella to Angelo on behalf of her brother, Claudio. Despite her brother's confidence in Isabella's rhetorical prowess, the deputy remains invulnerable to her 'prosperous art'.⁷⁸ Her attempt to 'play with reason and discourse' (1.184) appeals only to his baser instincts; when he relents, it is on condition that Isabella 'yield[s] up [her] body to [his] will' (2.4.163). And this, as far as Angelo knows, is exactly what she

⁷⁸ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J.W. Lever (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997), 1.2.183.

does. But in order that Isabella's eventual public accusation of Angelo might, in truth, be false, the disguised Duke Vincentio hatches a plan. Commonly known as the bed-trick, it involves the substitution in Angelo's bed of Mariana, Angelo's abandoned betrothed, for the votress whom he really desires. With this one simple switch, the Duke simultaneously preserves Isabella's chastity intact and helps Mariana lose hers in a good cause. But having devised this plan single-handed, the Duke seems rather squeamish about recommending it to Mariana. Paralysed with coyness, perhaps, he leaves it to Isabella, whom Mariana has never met, to supply all the details.

One cannot help but feel for Isabella here. Her unenviable task is twofold: first, she must acquaint Mariana, a stranger, with the unwanted advances made to her by the man Mariana still loves; second, she must persuade this woman to risk the consequences of sacrificing her own honour by attending Angelo's assignation in her place. So by what means does Isabella secure Mariana's complicity in this project? We never know. No willing audience to this conference, Vincentio tells Mariana to take her 'companion by the hand'. The pair withdraw, leaving Vincentio to shift metaphorically from foot to foot, filling dead air with a monologue on 'greatness' which, as many critics have noted, is singularly inappropriate to the occasion.

If this was all he had to replace it with, why did Shakespeare relegate an exchange with so much dramatic potential to the wings? Must we imagine a man so overcome with fastidiousness that he balked at giving voice to Isabella's appeal to Mariana for help?⁷⁹ Again we are in the realms of speculation, which dangerous territory can be avoided by means of the deft substitution of playwright for character so commonly practiced in criticism of *Measure for Measure*. Critics as diverse as Northrop Frye and Jean Howard have commented on the role of Vincentio as Shakespeare's stand-in 'comic dramatist'; in Jean-

⁷⁹ Other critics have offered alternative explanations. While accepting the theory (originally propounded by Warburton) that the unsuitability of the soliloquy suggests it was taken from an earlier speech of the Duke's, the editor of the Arden edition finds that, in other respects, 4.1. is 'dramatically consistent and structurally sound'. The point here is to introduce Mariana, he claims, and 'the audience must also be made to know that she accepts the Duke's plan, without having to hear yet again the story of Angelo's requirements', (xxi). Revealingly, Lever's

Pierre Maquerlot's opinion, this play especially lays bare the dramatist's reliance on the conventions of comedy — conventions which, in this case, oblige him to entrust 'some of his demiurgic powers to surrogate characters like ... Duke Vincentio'.⁸⁰ Working from similar assumptions allows Kenneth Gross to replace the question of why *Shakespeare* made Isabella's explanation inaudible with a consideration of *Vincentio*'s reasons for putting the women out of earshot. Gross himself is puzzled by the Duke's reluctance to give voice to his own scheme, but not unduly so:

Perhaps it should not surprise us that he is ready to instrumentalize these women - as he instrumentalizes other deputies in the play, always displacing authority for his actions, disimplicating himself even as he implicates others ... Even if we don't suppose that the Duke has doubts about the bed trick itself ... we can see a whole realm of shame, embarrassment, and unreadiness that the conversation might conjure up. It conjures up a set of spaces — Angelo's chambers and his double-gated garden — full of treachery. Having Isabella talk to Mariana alone thus allows the Duke to keep his distance from his own contrivance, from having to hear it talked about, as well as from any hesitancy or doubt we can imagine in the women themselves.⁸¹

Gross's explanation is plausible, certainly, but it forgets the fact that Shakespeare not Vincentio wrote *Measure for Measure*, and that Shakespeare, not Vincentio, decided whose speeches his audience would hear. Seeing the Duke's dismissal of the women as a way of assuaging his own anxiety would be easier, were it not for the fact that his creator would, some four years later, choose not to dramatise Valeria's petition to Volumnia either. When considered in the light of this later omission of a female pleading scene from *Coriolanus*, the

conviction that Isabella's petition would be tedious rather than dramatically powerful seems to be underwritten by a definite distaste for its subject matter.

⁸⁰ Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, *Shakespeare and the Mannerist Tradition: A Reading of Five Problem Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 168. See also Northrop Frye, *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), p. 23; Jean E. Howard, 'The Difficulties of Closure: An Approach to the Problematic in Shakespearean Comedy', in A.R. Braunmuller and J.C. Bulman, eds., *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan: Change and Continuity in the English and European Dramatic Tradition* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), p. 120.

⁸¹ Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 71-2.

playwright's decision to have Isabella speak inaudibly from 'aside' may be more significant than either Gross or Lever are willing to admit.

These criticisms aside, there is one point on which my own and Gross's analyses agree entirely. His emphasis on Duke Vincentio's propensity to 'instrumentalize' other characters is, I believe, one of the keys to understanding what is happening in the scenes of female supplication dramatised in this play.

When Isabella first approaches Angelo to plead on behalf of Claudio she is accompanied by Lucio, who accuses her of being too cold in her persuasion. Prompting her to a more rousing performance, his language explicitly links her ability to 'move' Angelo to her ability to tempt him sexually: 'Ay, touch him; there's the vein' (2.2.71); 'O to him, to him wench; he will relent. / He's coming, I perceive't' (2.2.124-5). From being too 'cold', Isabella begins to generate the kind of warmth encouraged by Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, who would be sure the conspirators 'bear fire enough / To kindle cowards'.⁸² The deputy's subsequent immovability as an enforcer of the law might therefore be seen as his reaction to Isabella's power to 'move' him. But ultimately, the Duke's resolution of the dilemma created by those who have moved and been moved, suggests that he finds such inconstancy wholly undesirable in his subjects. Only he is permitted to move others, and move them he does, like players around a board, euphemistically describing his control as 'direction'. 'If you can', he tells Isabella, 'pace your wisdom / In that good path that I would wish it go' (4.3.131-2). In doing so, he gives advice uncommonly similar to that offered by the writers of conduct manuals, who advised that 'for your Carriage, in the general, let it be a Medium'. And sure enough, it is not long before Isabella is discovered *in medias res*. Although the women are given the opportunity to prove that they are not dishonest, in other words, it is on the condition that they are moved by him. And although they escape defamation, the Duke engineers their restoration to grace on the open street, overtly denouncing their capacity to devise such a plot alone. The Duke's vindication of the women thus involves a very public removal of their agency:

⁸² William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1998), 2.1.120.

Someone hath set you on.
 Confess the truth, and say by whose advice
 Thou cam'st here to complain (5.1.112-14).

This is a good friar, belike,
 And to set on this wretched woman here
 Against our substitute! (5.1.131-3).

While the Duke ostensibly acts to lessen the burden of their blame, the effect is to pave the way for a triumphant demonstration that it is *he* who has set Isabella and Mariana on, in order that the quarry that is Angelo might be caught. The Duke's 'instrumentalisation' of his subjects is made necessary by Isabella's ability to 'kindle' the inner fires of Angelo, and when he steps in to take possession of the erstwhile votress in Act V, the Duke suggests that he is not a moment too soon: 'for **your** lovely sake, / Give me your hand and say you will be mine' (5.1.488-9). Apparently, Isabella represents a danger to herself as well as to others; if she goes free, he might not be around the next time she accidentally tempts a man with half frozen veins to 'raze' a sanctuary to the ground (2.2.171).

Conclusion

Reflecting on Nahum Tate's infelicitous addition of 'a love betwixt Edgar and Cordelia' in his infamous version of Shakespeare's *Lear*, George Colman goes on to note, in the 'Advertisement' to his own 1768 adaptation, that Tate 'has not only given Edmund a passion for Cordelia, but has injudiciously amplified on his criminal commerce with Goneril and Regan, which is the most disgusting part of the original':

The Rev. Dr Warton has doubted, 'whether the cruelty of the daughters is not painted with circumstances too savage and unnatural,' even by Shakespeare. Still, however, in Shakespeare, some motives for their conduct is assigned; but as Tate has conducted that part of the fable, they are equally cruel and unnatural, without the poet's assigning any motive at all.¹

Revealing as is this writer's attitude to the 'disgusting' relationship between Shakespeare's characters, I am more interested in the Warton-Colman-Tate triangle here. Where Warton suggests that Shakespeare has made his wicked sisters too wicked (though of this he seems unsure), Tate obviously considered them not wicked enough, and goes about fixing this deficiency in his own adaptation. Positioning himself in the middle, Colman implies that both are misguided, and, in doing so, points to Shakespeare's effort to excuse a pair who are surely among the most inexcusable of his creations.

The comment is interesting for its overt reference to Shakespeare's apparent inability to deal in 'black and white'. At the same time, it also highlights the phenomenon with which I attempted to deal in Chapter I through a comparison of the reactions of Ben Jonson and Samuel Johnson to Shakespeare's propensity to take human frailty in 'the better part'. The inability of Warton, Colman and Tate to agree on the implications and consequences of Shakespeare's tendency to assign motives, or to 'paint' with 'circumstances', gives a good sense

¹ George Colman, *The History of King Lear* (London, 1768), pp. ii-iii.

of the ambiguity inherent in the playwright's own ability to create moral ambiguity.

By suggesting that Shakespeare is willing to explore the motives driving a pair of women who, as their sister Cordelia claims, 'speak and purpose not', Colman also touches on the subject I went on to investigate in Chapters III and IV. Having examined the gendering of rhetorical colour, a concept so well-documented as to be hackneyed, I attempted to convey a sense of the radical ambiguity inherent in female excuse-makers, ostensibly far less blameworthy than Goneril and Regan, and to suggest that early modern audiences might well have attached to such women a negative moral charge which it is difficult for us to understand today.

At the start of this thesis I suggested that there were reasons other than the obvious one for beginning with prefaces. At its close, I hope I have shown that there are equally good reasons for not ending with an account of epilogues — the context in which strategies of extenuation are most obviously brought to bear. Shakespeare, as I aim to have demonstrated, rarely resorted to such ostentatious ways of making excuses.

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